THE MOON LADY

HELEN HUNTINGTON

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BY

HELEN HUNTINGTON

AUTHOR OF

"THE SOVEREIGN GOOD," "AN APPRENTICE TO TRUTH," ETC.

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CHAPTER I

THE maid had informed Humphrey that his mother was not at home. As he entered her sitting-room, therefore, he was surprised to see a feminine figure leaning over the cage of the piping bullfinch, whistling "Pretty Polly Perkins"—a rendering far inferior to that of the bird's.

Becoming aware of Humphrey's presence the apparition looked up with a start. She seemed very young, and had a face which brought an instant suggestion of sunshine and summer fragrance—rather as the word "June" does.

"What an extremely pretty girl!" was the thought which flashed first through his mind with the perfect banality of nature itself.

"I'm so sorry!" he said aloud—"I came to wait for my mother."

Just then the curtains hanging in front of an old-fashioned alcove were swept aside, revealing a large, thickly set woman with eye-glasses on her nose and an expression of intense efficiency in the commonplace

on her unhealthily flushed face. It was his mother's typist, Emma Cooper. She wore the air of one who had already been on the scene, and was now rushing to her cue for the second time.

"Miss Arnold," she said, "this is Mr. Humphrey Wylde, Mrs. Wylde's son—Miss Arnold is waiting by appointment," she explained to Humphrey, if it could be called an explanation.

Humphrey was puzzled; "appointment" had a professional, business-like sound. Was Miss Arnold an aspirant to literature (his mother was a well-known novelist), an agent of sorts, a representative of some charity board, or an interviewer? Nothing in her appearance suggested any of these suppositions; on the other hand nothing contradicted them.

"Sorry you have had to wait so long!" he said pleasantly. The girl protested that it did not matter in the least, and Humphrey thought her voice charming, low-pitched, and full of warmth and color, a Southern voice, but without Southern inflections.

"You like birds, I see!" he said, looking at the bullfinch, who was engaged in the infinitesimal activities of bird-cage life. "Have you heard this one do his little tune?"

"So many times!" replied the girl, laughing a little. "He had only just stopped, and I was trying to make him go on again when you came. They all do 'Pretty

Polly Perkins,' or nearly all. I've had five myself at one time and another, but they are so delicate, you know—they all died—and now I've nothing but a row of little bullfinch graves."

Humphrey endeavored to look sympathetic, but listened more to the music of her voice than to what she said. Again he wondered what the "appointment," referred to by Emma Cooper, could be about. His eyes rested on the face of the mysterious Miss Arnold with puzzled scrutiny.

Suddenly, and for no reason, as far as he could see, she flushed a brilliant rose-color. She was just young enough to imagine she had talked too much, and been a little naïve about her bullfinches. Her manner took on a shade more of formality.

"It was so kind of your mother to ask me to come to see her," she said. "I have only known her, up till now, by her books."

"You write yourself, perhaps?" said Humphrey tentatively.

"Oh, *no!*" exclaimed the girl, forgetting in the fervor of her disclaimer all self-consciousness. "I have no talents of any kind. I don't even know any clever people."

"We don't always know cleverness when we see it," replied Humphrey, "either in ourselves or any one else."

Personally he thought it didn't matter whether this charming mourner of bullfinches was clever or not—she was so many other delicious things.

"But we know it in books," she said. "The moment I began to read your mother's novel 'Hilmer Brothers' three years ago I knew she was a genius. After that I read every thing she ever published. They were like no other books in the world to me, and when at last I ventured to write to her and she answered asking me to come to see her, I felt it was one of the greatest things in my life."

Miss Cooper, who had been a silent listener to the conversation so far, here observed with conspicuous lack of tact that Mrs. Wylde was a great deal too kind-hearted and was always giving up her time to everybody.

Humphrey's face darkened; "Hadn't you better get on with that typewriting?" he said.

Miss Cooper, unconscious of offence, smiled cunningly to herself as she withdrew. "He wants to talk to that girl," she thought, "well let him—what's the harm."

"So you're going to meet my mother for the first time—she's quite a stranger to you!" said Humphrey reflectively, when the curtains closed behind Miss Cooper, and the typewriter had resumed its fierce, staccato theme.

"Yes—except that she doesn't seem strange to me. Don't you think, in a way, one can know a person better from what she writes than from what she says when she talks to you? You see, in talking, it's oneself and the other, and in writing it's the other person alone, not influenced by any consideration whatever."

"That's true—half-way true, at any rate," replied Humphrey. "People are freer with their minds when they write, but, on the other hand, for understanding each other—so much of it comes from just being together, sort of instinct, or magnetism—if that's the word—you know what I mean—don't you?"

"Oh—*yes!*" exclaimed Miss Arnold with impersonal intensity. She seemed to feel that they were having a conversation of much profundity and significance.

"Have you noticed my mother's portrait?" asked Humphrey by way of keeping up the conversation, and indicating an oil-painting by a well-known English artist, which hung over the mantel-piece. Miss Arnold crossed the room and placed herself beside Humphrey on the hearth-rug, from where she could have a better view of the picture. This simple action gave Humphrey unexplained pleasure.

"I've already seen reproductions of it in magazines," she said, "and, of course, it was the first thing I noticed when I came in the room this morning."

"What do you think of it?"

"It seems to me more of a *picture*—than a portrait, somehow. It doesn't tell me anything about your mother."

The two young people stood and gazed up at the portrait for a moment in silence.

It might have been considered, even in its lack of expression, as brooding over them fatefully, withholding something from their unconscious question. "How wonderful it must be for you to be always with her!" exclaimed the girl—really naïve—now that she was no longer conscious of being so.

"This whole room tells things about my mother," said Humphrey finally. "Do you notice the faint scent of amber? It's been part of my thoughts of her ever since I was a child. And see how many fur rugs there are! That's my mother too! She likes fur better than jewels or lace."

Linda looked about her as if for the first time. A magnificent tiger skin on the floor showed mottled tawny yellow, black and white. Of a sudden she saw in its pattern the sunlight flickering through boughs of a jungle. A polar-bear rug had warm tints of old ivory, and was time-stained like long-lingering snow where white melts into pale grays and yellows. And there were other furs too: a silvery gray wolf-skin, a black bear, smooth to the eye as burnt-over marshes,

and an eider-down cover of a delicate mushroom brown, so soft that the touch of it was like cream on the palate. "Oh—I understand why she cares so much for them!" cried Linda.

"Yes," replied Humphrey. "I understand too!" Just then they heard the ring of the door-bell downstairs. "There she is now, I expect!" he cried. "I'll go to meet her and tell her that you are here." He spoke, unthinkingly, as if he and the visitor were already old friends.

When he returned he was preceded by a lady who came into the room with a grace, a hint of half-capricious freedom, which would have been arresting and conspicuous even in a crowd.

Mrs. Wylde looked young, but her youth seemed touched by faint, and what seemed premature, decay. She was beautiful too, with a classic profile, deeply set, weary eyes, and much unruly auburn hair; but her beauty evoked less of pleasure than an indefinable and mysterious pity. There was something at once wistful and haggard in her face, as if she asked too much of life and could bear too little. She was like the finest possible knife-blade worn to the sharpest possible edge. More than anything else she made the appeal of mystery.

Even Humphrey felt it, accustomed as he was to being with her. He watched Miss Arnold curiously as she looked at his mother's face for the first time.

It did not surprise him that her interest, already stimulated by Mrs. Wylde's books, seemed captured entirely by her personality. After their first words Dioneme made the young girl sit down beside her on a sofa, saying that they must have a good talk together. Something at once practised, gracious, and indifferent in her manner indicated it was not the first time she had entertained youthful votaries.

"I am afraid to talk to you," said the girl. "I want only to listen."

"You will listen and I will look, then," replied Mrs. Wylde. "One always looks at youth." The girl tried to say something about beauty which was more than that of mere youth.

"Mine, you mean?" said Mrs. Wylde. "Mine is a mere legend that has grown up around me, one of those ignorant and superstitious beliefs which even time cannot quite destroy." She smiled a little, but without much mirth.

"So you like my books—" she went on, after a minute. "You told me so in your letter. I wish some one would say that to me every hour of the day! It would make work so much easier!" She smiled again, more gayly now, with a sparkle in her eyes.

"Will there be a new one soon?" asked the girl eagerly.

"That is the new one," Mrs. Wylde answered, indicating the unseen but very audible typewriter.

"That is its pre-natal cry! What do you make of it?"

"I think they will keep on getting more and more wonderful—but the one I like best is 'Hilmer Brothers.'"

"And why?"

The girl glanced uneasily at Humphrey, and he knew that she wished he would go away. It was clear to him, also, that his presence was superfluous, yet he could not bring himself to leave at once.

"I must tell you some time when I know you better," said Miss Arnold. "To-day I feel afraid." Humphrey, looking at her eyes, fancied them colored like a trout-stream in which summer leaves are reflected.

"We shall soon know each other better," said Dioneme. "And you've made friends with my son already, he tells me. He is not in the least literary, but he criticises me in spite of it. He says my male characters are not real men, and that my idea of a man is just something to make love to a woman.

"However—" she went on in a whimsical and captivating way, "if one goes deeply into it, perhaps there *are* no manly men. You don't understand me, of course, but let me tell you what happened to me not long ago. Some critic had just said that most of the men in my books were weak and effeminate, and I was feeling rather resentful in consequence, so de-

cided (though I never as a rule take my characters from real life) that I would look about among my friends and acquaintances, select one of the most manly men, and immortalize him in all his splendid boldness and force.

"Can you imagine what my feelings were when I tell you that, in spite of a sufficiently large acquaintance, I couldn't think of anybody!"

It was impossible to tell from the speaker's accent whether she was making light of a real conviction, or treating a joke seriously. Linda Arnold gave an uncertain laugh—but Dioneme's mind was off on a new track. "You have such a charming name," she said, abruptly. "I remember from your note—'Linda'!—that means beautiful in Spanish. I was afraid it might not suit you—but it does."

The girl blushed. "It always seemed to me rather a foolish, sentimental name," she said. "My sister chose it—the one who brought me up—my mother died when I was only a few weeks old."

Humphrey saw that his mother, though apparently listening to what Miss Arnold was saying, was really absorbed in her own thoughts. Perhaps, with her usual vivid insight, she contemplated young girlhood in its essence, with its seriousness, its simplicity, its reserve, its enormous and lovable egotism. It might be that she saw this particular young girl as a symbol

of her entire sex at its moment of flowering and innocence, felt the pathos of it all, the wonder, the mystery, —looked ahead and divined a future—the inevitable lover—until she was rushed along by the current of her fancy to some fleeting conception of all womankind, forever dominated by man, forever guarding from this appointed and often beloved master the secret of her thought of him.

He felt that the time had come to leave the two together, and so he did. His mother hardly noticed his farewell nor his departure, but the girl gave a sigh of relief.

"One can talk so much easier when one is alone!" she said involuntarily.

"That is true," agreed her hostess. At this thought she summoned Miss Cooper from her alcove.

"You can go to lunch now, Emma," she said. "I sha'n't want you until two o'clock."

"But it's only twelve-thirty, and I never lunch until one," protested Miss Cooper, as if aggrieved.

"To-day you can lunch earlier," said Mrs. Wylde sweetly, but with decision.

"I don't *want* to lunch," said the typist, with the air of one doggedly defending a principle. "You never wanted me to lunch at twelve-thirty before!"

Mrs. Wylde made no reply, but looked fixedly at her employee with a faint, formal smile on her lips.

Miss Cooper walked toward the door. She murmured something unintelligible. It might have been divined that she was repeating that she never lunched until one.

"Emma is fond of me," commented Mrs. Wylde, "but she finds me irresponsible and erratic. Once I spelled *rhapsody* without an h and she couldn't understand it, because I had never spelled it that way before. She often speaks of it."

"My sister is like that, in a way," said Linda Arnold. "She always expects people to be consistent, and if they're not she thinks they are unreliable. She is very consistent herself—and so good——!"

Now, the girl felt, they were really launched on that momentous *talk* to which she had been looking forward for days.

It seemed to Humphrey, who was waiting downstairs, a very long interview, but finally he heard the parlor-maid closing the front door, and going to the window he was in time to see Miss Arnold walking down the street. He could not see her face, but in the curving grace and buoyancy of her young figure there was something which suggested to him the lift upward of a wave of the sea.

CHAPTER II

LATER, in the drawing-room, Humphrey and his mother waited for luncheon to be announced. Their surroundings were conventional, artistic and comfortable. Chairs and tables of Georgian style, chintzes, old engravings and porcelains—a delightful room—but like many others. Those who knew Dioneme sometimes wondered that her personality did not express itself in a more unusual interior, not realizing that the greater the imagination the more it can dispense, as a rule, with artificial stimulus. The real poet and dreamer sees not his surroundings, but the ineffable beauty of his dream. "Tell me more about that girl this morning," said Humphrey. He stood on the bear-skin rug in front of the wood-fire, his feet well apart as if to brace himself against unexpected attack, his hands in his pockets. The oval Hepplewhite mirror over the chimney-piece reflected the back of his head with its smooth black hair and he looked down at his mother with the steady blue eyes which he had inherited from a sailor grandfather. There was a hint of sly humor in these eyes, as well as of the qualities of courage and patience it so often is called upon to support.

Dioneme's slimness trailed along a low chair as flexibly as a scarf cast upon it. She returned Humphrey's gaze with an amused sparkle in her face, but no jealous apprehension. She knew that Humphrey had never cared for young girls.

"You've already learned her name," she said. "She lives with her father and sister in a new house on upper Fifth Avenue. The people she knows are the ones who make an art of living, and are as a rule ignorant of other arts, except for purposes of patronage. They are agreeable certainties. I attract her because I am an uncertainty to her—the unknown, and also because she likes my books.

"Seemed a nice kind of girl," observed Humphrey, with studied carelessness.

"She is coming again soon—but only to see *me*, remember!" Dioneme went on—again with the hint of innuendo. It amused her, knowing his real indifference, to speak as if Humphrey might be interested in the visitor.

In a way she was right. Heretofore young girls had not pleased Humphrey, their very girlishness was an annoyance, they were so serious about the serious things of life! Where the married woman laughed—the girl, as often as not, uttered a solemn platitude, where the wise married woman was silent—the girl invariably gushed.

But what his mother did not divine was that Miss Arnold had struck him as strangely and appealingly different.

He meditated in silence for a moment on the odd and rather attractive slant of her eyebrows, which he had happened to particularly notice that morning. Her voice, too, had certainly a vibration which haunted one.

"She was pretty—didn't you think so?—like a spring flower with the sun on it!" said Dioneme, whose mind worked in similes.

She clasped her hands behind her head and gazed into the fire as she went on:

"I don't know when I've had a visitor who pleased me so much, or who seemed to appreciate me so well. Of course I'm perfectly well aware that only unqualifying admirers are called appreciators by any writer. The flattery which really satisfies one is the flattery of youth, the over-estimation of those who cannot possibly know!" It was characteristic of Dioneme's low opinion of her own work that she put down unrestricted praise as the inevitable offspring of ignorance.

"Still she was an intelligent little thing—" she went on meditatively, more to herself than Humphrey.

He did not answer her. He was thinking that he and Miss Arnold would almost certainly meet again,

even if he did not—as he might be tempted—break in on his mother's interviews with her.

"What time is it?" asked Dioneme suddenly.

"The clock's before your eyes and a watch on your wrist," said Humphrey laughing. "Why ask me!"

"But the clock has stopped and my watch says half-past nine. No one's timepiece but yours goes in this house. By the way, I thought of such a nice design for a clock the other day. Father Time playing diabolo with an hour-glass!"

"I thought diabolo was out of fashion."

"So it is, but that will only make my clock more quaint and rococo. What time did you say it was?"

"It's half-past one. Why don't we have lunch?"

"It's ready now," replied Dioneme as the parlor-maid appeared in the door. They went into the dining-room, which, like most New York dining-rooms, was dark and showed through the draped windows a vista of brick walls. Two electric lights, burning in side brackets, helped to eke out the pale and feeble light of day. But in the semi-obscurity Dioneme's splendid hair gleamed and her white face was young and exquisite.

Humphrey unfolded his napkin, and seemed to arouse himself for the first time from his state of absent-mindedness.

"Well, and how are you to-day, my dear mother?" he said, as if they had just met.

"Pretty well," said Dioneme simply.

"I mean, how are your mind and heart and soul?"

"Oh, *starved*," she replied, with an accent, half-playful, half-sincere, "all starved."

"Perhaps they're overfed," suggested Humphrey. "Rather alike, aren't they—the pains of starvation and indigestion?"

"Don't talk about it!" exclaimed Dioneme. "You wouldn't understand!" A pause ensued.

"How is the new story coming on?" asked Humphrey finally.

"It's almost finished, but I can't think of a name. I lie awake nights, but nothing comes to me—nothing, nothing, *nothing!*"

"Why don't you take a book—the Bible, for instance, that's full of titles!—shut your eyes and put your finger on a line. That would be as good a way as any other. Titles don't have anything to do with the book, as far as I can see. I've just read a story called, 'Sick Cannons'—any human being know what that means?"

Dioneme laughed, but with the air of one who humors a child. She seemed self-absorbed and merely played with the food on her plate.

"Very good, this minced chicken," said Humphrey,

helping himself liberally. "Take some more, mother. You don't eat enough."

"I can't eat," said Dioneme. "I'm not hungry. All I want is a cup of coffee." Just then the telephone bell rang in the hall, and the maid went to answer it.

"Some one wants to speak to Mr. Humphrey," she said when she returned. While her son was gone Dioneme abstractedly picked to pieces a rose which she took from the silver bowl in the centre of the table. When the operation was finished she looked at the strewn petals and the naked stalk with something like horror, as if she had waked suddenly from a state of somnambulism to find herself dissecting the body of a little delicate animal.

After a few moments Humphrey came back.

"It was Norris," he said. Norris Peters was his best friend and associate architect. "Something about the plans we're working on now."

"For that Michigan medical college, you mean?"

"Yes, Norris has just seen one of the faculty, and he says that the old man most interested in it, in fact the one who is giving most of the money, has his heart set on something in what he calls 'Christian IV style,' kind of Danish Renaissance! It appears he came from Copenhagen, or his father did. 'The cradle always calls,' as the Spanish proverb says. Now, of course, whoever pleases this old man—his name is

Garborg—will get the building. He's capable of throwing away no end of money in plans until he gets what he wants."

"What is Danish Renaissance?" asked Dioneme.

"A mongrel offspring of the Dutch sixteenth century style. I'll show you a picture I've got somewhere of the Exchange in Copenhagen. It's got a tower one hundred and sixty-seven feet high, surmounted by four huge dragons standing on their heads with their tails entwined. Of course, we couldn't be responsible for a building in Christian IV style, besides our plan is already thought out, all 'Beaux Arts,' if you like, but good of its kind. Some one has got to persuade old Garborg that he doesn't want Copenhagen architecture in La Salle, Michigan, and Norris thinks he can do it. He's going on to Washington, where Garborg is staying until Sunday, to have a talk with him."

Humphrey, interested in his subject, talked on and on, until he noticed that his mother's expression was distant and preoccupied, though she kept her eyes on his face with an attempt at real attention. Only at the mention of the sky-signalling dragons' tails had any spark kindled in her. Plainly, and regrettably from an artistic point of view, the architectural monstrosity delighted her imagination with its suggestion of the fanciful and *baroque*.

When her son stopped she said, very sincerely and

with apparently deep interest, that she hoped he would get the building. She wanted him to succeed.

"Not so much for the money; there's money enough for us both!"

Humphrey winced, and seemed about to reopen some old discussion, but changed his mind, and they went back into the drawing-room to take their coffee by the fire. "Bring some green chartreuse, too, Ellen," said Dioneme.

Humphrey frowned. "Bad for you, mother!" he said, "you can't write books on no food and green chartreuse!"

"But I'm so tired, Humphrey, and I want to do two hours' more work this afternoon. I must have something to give me strength, you see!"

She looked at her son with pretty cajolery as if he had been her lover, but he did not answer for a moment. The maid brought the coffee, the bottle of chartreuse, and the liqueur glasses, and put them down on a small round mahogany table near the fire.

Humphrey, in his old place in front of the chimney-piece, watched her abstractedly. There was a troubled expression on his face as if he considered difficulties which were as yet uncertainties. Finally he said:

"You know we had a talk the other day about stimulants, and you agreed to give them up."

"Yes, I know, and I have for the most part. You saw I took only one small glass of white wine at lunch! But when I *need* it!"

"You don't need it, that's just the point; regular poison for you, alcohol is! A nervous, highly strung woman like you!—But why do we have to go over the whole thing again. You promised, you remember."

A flicker of rare anger showed in Dioneme's eyes. His tone though affectionate was peremptory. A child did not speak so to his mother! And he was too tedious and matter-of-fact, unlike himself! "Don't preach, Humphrey," she said shortly, and taking her coffee, drank it down in quick gulps. Humphrey's remained untouched. He seemed to have forgotten it. Neither of them spoke, and in the silence there was a certain gravity and disquietude.

Suddenly Dioneme rose and with a pretty and impulsive gesture laid her hand on her son's broad shoulders.

"I can't bear to see you feel this way about nothing at all," she said. "I won't take it."

"Good," said Humphrey briefly, with his arm around her. They stood close together in this way for a moment without speaking, then Dioneme threw herself down in her low chair again. Humphrey reached for his neglected coffee and sipped it slowly while his mother began to talk.

"You can't realize, a strong creature like you," she said, with her usual charm and intensity, "how one feels when stimulant of some kind becomes a necessity. To-day I'm like a hop-vine trying to stand up without its pole. Everything seems so queer and light and unreal to me!

"Do you remember, Humphrey, when you were a child and used to blow soap-bubbles? Just at the end, before they burst, the colors deepened and whirled in them till one was giddy! The world seems that way to me sometimes, swimming and changing and meaningless. It's all *unbearable!* I feel as if I were going mad."

"Nerves," said Humphrey laconically, but there was an unboyish accent of sympathy and comprehension in his voice. "What you need is rest. Go and take a nap this minute, will you? I'm off to the office!" He leaned over and dropped a kiss on his mother's hair. "Man who saw you with me the other day thought you were my sister," he said, and departed.

Dioneme listened to his footsteps in the hall and to the opening and closing of the front door without moving. Gradually the smile which his last words had brought to her lips faded and her face grew almost haggard again.

"His name, *Humphrey*, means 'protector of the

house,'" she said to herself, fancifully. For a moment she may have felt a pride in thinking that her son was stronger than she, then she gradually reverted to the abuse of her own dignity in his supervision and watchfulness. At last she seemed to dismiss the subject with a sigh, got up and went to the window, looking out, absent-mindedly, on the hard, sunlit street, which was beginning to wake up to its decorous afternoon activities. The luncheon guests of the lady who lived opposite fluttered through the door, one by one, like pigeons issuing from a cote, entered their waiting carriages or motors, and were borne away. Then the hostess herself made an imposing sortie, flanked by her butler, footman, carriage groom and toy-dog, and drove off in a high-swung victoria, the plume in her toque waving loftily.

At another house they began to lay down a strip of red carpet, horrid portent of an afternoon tea. Delivery wagons rattled by, and asthmatic taximetre cabs. A mounted policeman took up his stand on the corner and petrified himself into a statue of law and order. Above the houses the sky showed a crude brilliant blue, the light and shadow everywhere was sharp-edged, incisive; there was something almost brutal in the exposure of every outline and detail, something raw, uncompromising, unpersuasive, like the city itself. After a time it increased Dioneme's

nervousness. Her limbs seemed full of twitching springs. She was so exhausted that she longed for inaction, but it was impossible for her to keep still, and she paced up and down the room a few times with her hand clutching her throat, a prey to the most torturing nervousness. Her eyes fell again on the glass of chartreuse and lingered as if fascinated. It glowed, soft, translucent, like some splendid green peridot.

"Humphrey makes himself ridiculous," she thought, with sudden anger and felt as if she must shriek aloud with the tension of her nerves. The oily green liqueur continued to hold her gaze with the strange spell of jewels.

"I won't take it, I won't take it," she said, half aloud, but even as she spoke, moved by some force stronger than her own volition, she walked to the table, seized the glass, and swallowed the liqueur eagerly. It seemed of mingled fire and oil. Almost at once warmth flowed through her veins, every muscle relaxed, the tension on her nerves ceased. She imagined she felt like one of those dried Japanese plants which, placed in water, gently unfold. Her eyelids drooped heavily over her eyes with a sense of delicious languor.

The second glass of chartreuse thrilled her with its sweet exotic perfume, she thought of fields of strange flowers, of the clinging fragrance of Eastern bazaars, and sipped it slowly, slowly, lingering over each swal-

low. Then she sank back into her low chair and closed her eyes. How wonderful to feel the world slipping away in this glow of peace and happiness. No thought of Humphrey troubled her. Oh, the ecstasy of relief from that agony of the nerves! Now she could sleep, now she could forget!

When Humphrey came back that evening, unusually late, for he had stopped at his club on the way, he found his mother had already gone out.

"Mrs. Wylde was dining with some people and going to the play afterward, I think, sir," explained the maid of whom he made inquiries. He was a little surprised, as this kind of festivity was one Dioneme had not indulged in since his father's death. In his own room, however, he found a note from his mother, scribbled hastily in pencil, in which she gave the same explanation of her absence. "I forgot to tell you this morning," she said. Looking at the note again he saw there was a postscript: "I felt so badly after you went away that I took the liqueur, after all." The words reverberated in Humphrey with a sense of great import. He had not guessed, until now, that there was any question of temptation. Here, too, was a faint signal to him of something sinister, something from which his mind recoiled. There passed over him the first dim perception of the tragic, for tragedy lies

not in the fact itself, but in the shadow which it casts on the soul. His mother had broken her promise to him. What did this petty betrayal mean?

By it he perceived a new and painful significance to past and future. How long had it been since he had first noticed his mother's fondness for stimulants? He could not remember.

There flashed through his mind a sudden remembrance of a play he had once seen in a French theatre. The details came back vaguely. There had been a pretty woman, lightly intoxicated, the whole a mere bit of Gallic humor, daintily done, acceptable. He had laughed, he recollected, with the rest. Now certain words, pronounced in a whisper even, but in connection with his mother, were monstrous, obscene. They made the world reel.

Later he pulled himself together by an effort and denied, with determined bravado, his own perception. It was a momentary supposition, only, which had arrested him, a fear showing a face like reality. Finally he succeeded in reaching a state of mind in which he could take a certain satisfaction in his mother's frankness of avowal and no longer ask whether the avowal itself came from indifference to a small thing or acknowledgment of a great.

CHAPTER III

HUMPHREY'S childhood had been spent in one of the older New Jersey suburbs—a place unknown to fashion and contemptuous of it. In Ompton people lived with decorum and strict economy, paid their discreet tribute to contemporary art, science, and literature, and dwelt much on their ancestry. The celebrities of this community were often distantly connected with celebrities of the adjacent metropolis. The local financial magnate was cousin to a world-famous railroad president, the head of the Ompton Fortnightly Literary Club was a nephew of the editor of ——'s Magazine, and the style in hats was set by a lady whose sister had married into the family of a Newport millionaire.

Humphrey's father and mother had never held much intercourse with their neighbors, but lived somewhat apart, the latter occupied with her writing, while Morris Wylde kept to himself by reason of the delicate and instinctive fastidiousness which made him, all his life, more or less of an enigma to those who knew him.

The Wyldes' house was a long, low, wooden one, painted brown, and with a veranda which ran along

three sides of it. It stood on a corner at the top of a hill and had a smoothly clipped lawn around it, and a small kitchen garden at the back.

The street on the side of the house led down past a strip of low-lying waste land to the railroad tracks and was called Murray Street. It symbolized for Humphrey all that his childish imagination divined of fear and of evil.

At the top of the street stood, first of all, the Insane Asylum, an edifice of bleak red brick which ran down precipitously at the back to where the Ompton River, muddy and sluggish, lay among a tangle of wild plants and straggling trees and received the refuse from sewer-pipes.

Beyond this river was the sunken ground, twenty feet, perhaps, below the level of the road, so that, in passing along the sidewalk, one looked down into it as if it were a yawning gulf.

Coarse, ill-smelling weeds and all kind of rank vegetation flourished in the Murray Street low ground, snakes crawled there and sometimes came up to lie with their slimy lengths along the sidewalk; in rainy springs the place was flooded and smelt of yellow ooze, and on humid summer nights it reeked of malaria and was alive with poisonous mosquitoes and with myriads of fire-flies, twinkling like baleful flames.

To walk along Murray Street was always an ad-

venture to Humphrey. It was like going out into a jungle and facing swarming, unseen perils. At night he sometimes dreamed of it, and woke with a start, cold and damp with perspiration.

Of course he said nothing of all this to his parents, being ashamed of his unmanly terrors and resolved to conquer them. The evil spell of Murray Street remained therefore unsuspected by either Dioneme or Mr. Wylde.

On Sundays Humphrey went with his father to the ivy-covered stone church of St. John the Divine.

Dioneme seldom accompanied them, and was much condemned by her neighbors in consequence. Some of them professed to have seen her on Sunday mornings strolling, bare-headed, through a little grove at the edge of the town, singing to herself like a mad Ophelia, and once, on Ascension Day, she created quite a scandal by galloping noisily down Main Street on her chestnut horse just as the congregation were coming out from evening prayer.

Dioneme was, at all times, much discussed in Ompton as was to have been expected. People argued with each other about her strange pale beauty, which some could see and others denied, and repeated what they knew of her history.

She had, it appeared, been born in Honolulu (which of itself had an outlandish sound). Her father had

been a naval officer, of a distinguished Southern family, but her mother was no more than an actress in a San Francisco theatre, who had died young and unknown to fame. Dioneme, when a young girl, had followed her father, in vagabond fashion, around the world (tales, more or less fabulous, were told of her adventures in various ports).

At eighteen she had won a prize offered by a London newspaper syndicate for the best story of ten thousand words, and that was the beginning of her literary career. Soon afterward, at Nice, she had met Morris Wylde, the son of an old but somewhat obscure Knickerbocker family, and they had married after a month's acquaintance.

"A queer marriage!" said the people of Ompton—and predicted disaster. They had a vague pride in Dioneme as a noted writer, though they did not like her books, which they found disconcerting in their ruthless presentation of facts, hysterical in their ardent imagination. "Morbid" was the word most often used in regard to them.

But Humphrey never suspected that his father and mother differed from other boys' fathers and mothers. He, of all the family, identified himself with his surroundings. He went, as a child, to a kindergarten and afterward to a boys' day school, where he became extremely popular. He played tennis and foot-ball,

made a collection of postage-stamps, raised bull-terriers, and sent valentines to the girls. When he was fifteen his father inherited from an old aunt the house on Madison Avenue and a small fortune, and they moved to New York. Ompton receded into the shadowy distance, except, perhaps, Murray Street, which through all his life continued to menace him in dreams.

From this time Dioneme's reputation grew rapidly. She was absorbed by her work and the interests and excitements it brought her, and her husband was absorbed in her. Humphrey, away at school, spending his holidays often with his boy friends, grew more and more out of touch with his father and mother. When he was at home the house was always either full of people or wrapped in a hush which no one must disturb, as it meant that his mother was working.

Among the people or in the hush moved his father, more or less like a stage hero to him, sympathetic, but strangely unapproachable, hidden from familiar knowledge as if in some quaintly fashioned mantle of other times, a pleasing and dignified figure, but moving only, as it were, to the breath of another's inspiration.

Humphrey entered college early, graduated at twenty, and went abroad to study architecture at the Beaux Arts. In Paris he discovered Beauty and learned the *blague* of the schools. Matronly members of the now rapidly disintegrating American colony

made him at home in their exactly similar apartments, and saw to it that he ate turkey at Christmas. Through the friendship of some compatriots, who had married into the Faubourg, he also ventured, now and then, (*joli garçon et très sympathique!*) into French society.

When he was twenty-three, having lived abroad uninterruptedly and without having seen his parents for three years, he received a cable summoning him home. His father was seriously ill.

He sailed at once, and during the six days on board the *Deutschland* walked the decks almost unceasingly, in the midst of cold and fog and rain, thinking over the relationship of father and son which, under the menace of loss, became of great significance. What if it should be too late for him ever to know his father! On a gray November morning, the *Deutschland*, after a long delay at Quarantine, began to steam slowly toward New York. From an upper deck Humphrey watched, in vague impatience, the outlines of the coast. Suddenly from thin, pink eyelets in the clouds rays of sunlight slanted down over distant Coney Island. The sullen water warmed with tints of blue and green. The bay narrowed, and now gulls flew circling around the ship. On the shore bleak suburban villas showed over banks of wintry green. Then the city lifted itself out of the rose-flecked fog, shouting across the water of its force and brutality. Dim towers and factory

chimneys, bridges, gas-tanks, vast office-buildings and grain-elevators strove, in their glimpsed, uncouth immensity, to drive away any gracious and tender thoughts of home. For a moment Humphrey felt that coming back to one's own land was less like casting oneself into the bosom of a mother than saluting an armed and mailed commander to whom one owed allegiance. Then his thoughts fastened themselves anew on his own anxieties. The boat was nearing the dock now. He looked over the mass of faces on the pier, but could see none that was familiar.

Was it a good sign or a bad? He could not be sure. As he was walking down the gang-plank he caught sight of a red-headed young man whom he recognized as the assistant of their family physician. This person hurried up to him at once.

"Glad to see you back," he said. "Your father's no worse to-day. They thought I'd better come down and tell you."

Humphrey cleared his throat before he could answer. The strain of the long uncertainty had been greater than he had realized. He had feared graver news.

"Thanks, very much, Giddings." He dreaded to put the next question—but it must be done.

"He—he's pretty bad?"

"We think he will live another day or two."

"Ah!" Humphrey squared his shoulders. Now

he knew the worst, and could compel himself to face it. He thought of Dioneme.

"And my mother? Has she broken down? How is she?"

"Nearly worn out, of course—the watching and anxiety. She got some sleep last night. We gave her a little morphine."

Giddings pushed his way rapidly through the crowd on the dock and Humphrey followed him.

"I've got a taxi here for you. Just jump right in and go along. There'll be no trouble about the customs —foreign resident, you know. Man here with me will see to all that for you!"

Giddings rushed Humphrey into the taxi-cab, slammed the door, and before the latter knew it, he was rattling through the Hoboken streets and had crossed the ferry on his way home. The skies were still lowering, the sun trying vainly to force its way through the light fog. In the dingy streets near the river the air seemed raw and tainted. Yet, though it was a crowded quarter, there was little noise or animation, no street cries or babble of voices or children's laughter. Humphrey felt that he had forgotten what New York was like. They reached Madison Square, and he noted the changes in it mechanically. He wished the motor would go faster. They turned into Madison Avenue, and soon afterward stopped in front

of a brownstone house with a high old-fashioned "stoop." Humphrey jumped out, thrust into the driver's hand the fare ready for him, and rushed up the steps. He found his mother in the long, dim drawing-room. She said nothing when she saw him, but he saw there were tears in her eyes, and he took her in his arms, feeling how soft and tremulous she was, and that she was a woman and must be comforted.

"Your father wants to see you," she managed to say finally. "He is in his old room, quite quiet now—and without any pain. You must go to him at once."

"Will you come too?"

"No, dear, he asked to see you alone."

Humphrey went up the stairs quickly, but with a kind of heaviness as if he were no longer a young man. To his surprise, he found his father sitting up, or rather half reclining, in an invalid's chair. An old gray army blanket covered his feet and knees, and there was a white linen pillow under his head. His delicate, intellectual face was yellow and drawn, but had lost nothing of its look of calmness and distinction. Only his blue eyes shone with a kind of unnatural brightness, and there was a tremor in his hands.

The room where he lay was almost painful in its neatness and order, there was little to suggest illness; it was evident that the real battle was over; science

and humanity, outmatched, had surrendered to their conqueror, and everything was ready for his arrival.

Humphrey greeted his father quietly, controlling with difficulty the lump in his throat. He felt as if the man in front of him was, in some sense, a stranger, but a stranger whose loss would be irremediable, because he carried in himself the promise of being a friend.

During Wylde's life the very conventionality of his words and manner had, in its exaggeration, made a mystery of him. He cut himself off from his fellow-creatures' comprehension by his scrupulous conformity to their own regulations. They were baffled by him because he never defied them.

Now, at the last, however, this strange, impersonal disguise seemed slipping away from him, or rather it was as if he deliberately clutched it with both hands and tore it off in desperation. The soul, at its moment of farewell, would not be hampered.

"Humphrey—my dear boy—" he said, and faltered. Humphrey sat down beside his father and laid his hand gently on his. In spite of the effort he made, the tears came to his eyes.

"You have been away a long time—three years," said the older man.

"It was your wish, father."

"Yes, I know. And you have worked well, I hear. It is hard that you should not be able to go back,

but your place, hereafter, will be here, with your mother."

"I can go on with my work, now, anywhere," said Humphrey. "I need never leave you and my mother."

"It is I who must be leaving now."

They sat in silence for a moment or two, Humphrey struggling not to give way to his emotion, and his father staring through the window at the bare tracery of a wistaria vine on the rear wall of a brick house facing them. His eyes had the deep and clouded look of those whose gaze is turned inward, and who no longer perceive the visible.

"I want to talk to you about the future—and what I am bequeathing to you, Humphrey," he said, after a time. "Not of property,"—and he made a slight, impatient gesture with his hand—"all that sort of thing you will find in order—it will explain itself and my old friend, Martin, who is one of my executors will help you. It is something else." He paused and a flame seemed to kindle in his eyes. "I want to speak to you about your mother," he said finally.

At his words it seemed as if, with a last wrench, the disguise of years had fallen. Humphrey suddenly realized that the whole passion and mystery of his father's life had been his wife.

"You have known her as a child," went on the older man, "and accepted her as a child accepts the peo-

ple around him, without analysis or comprehension, merely as beings who provide and support. Later you have heard of her reputation, and, perhaps, been proud —or at times annoyed—at having your mother a famous writer. But of the woman herself you know nothing."

"That is quite true," said Humphrey. "I went away from home a boy."

"It is as a man that I am going to speak to you, for I want you to understand your mother. She is more than maternal, more than woman. She is, first and foremost, a genius, a creature of fire and fancy, apart from the rest of us, infinitely strong and infinitely weak. To her life must be poetry." He paused, fatigued with the effort of talking. When he spoke again it was half-dreamily as if to himself: "Was she not born on a midsummer night, in an island of the sea, and christened from a book of Herrick's songs! Beauty is the essential with her, and the world of men, which is unbeautiful, becomes at times intolerable. To escape from it she might seize the first thing that came to her hand. It is at moments like these she must be guarded. Think of the loneliness of a soul like hers, perceiving often what to us is unknown! The anguish of trying to reveal it to us—and seeing us staring stupidly, incapable of comprehension!" Again he paused and Humphrey waited in silence.

"And this power in a woman, do you realize what that means, the frailness of the body, with its constant ebb and flow of nervous will, the timidity of instinct, the rack of intuition?

"There were times when your mother was a mere quivering child in my arms, times when she soared so far above me that even the wings of my love could not reach her. But even when coldest and most remote she touched my brain with a kind of madness. She was forever changing—like the moon!—I called her my Moon Lady."

Wylde seemed to forget his son for a moment. His head fell on his breast and with closed eyes he lived over old days and nights. Finally he roused himself.

"Humphrey," he said, "you must take care of your mother, as I have done—I leave her in your charge."

"I will do my best." Humphrey was sensible of much that was unexpressed in his father's words and would have liked to have questioned him about he knew not what, but now the sick man began to show signs of great fatigue, and at the desire of the nurse, who came in just then, Humphrey left him.

Two days afterward he died peacefully, with his eyes turned on Dioneme's face.

CHAPTER IV

MORRIS WYLDE had left all his affairs in order, as he had said, and after his death Humphrey found there was little for him to do personally in regard to settling up the estate.

His mind turned toward his profession. One of his Paris friends urged him to open an office with him in New York, and this he finally decided to do.

He regretted that he could not have finished his course at the Beaux Arts, but hoped that practical experience would in the long run make up for the loss of further academical training. If his mother had proposed living in Paris he might have gone on with his studies there, but she did not do so, probably because with her usual self-absorption the idea did not come to her.

Moreover, Humphrey had once heard her say that she hated Paris and could never work there. He put the whole matter aside therefore as of small importance.

The first year of their mourning passed not too unhappily. Life with his mother was interesting to Humphrey. It was more forming a new relation than resuming an old one, and Dioneme did not lack fas-

cination, even for her son. Without making any conscious effort he became necessary to her. She liked to talk to him; he never bored her, either with intrusive youth or lack of understanding, and Dioneme's capacity for boredom extended beyond the bar of blood or affection.

The individual on whom for the moment she flashed the light of her imagination was always interesting to her, no matter of how common a clay he was really made—but woe to the one who sat temporarily in darkness and clamored for attention out of his turn! Humphrey never made demands, so his society was always acceptable. The maternal in Dioneme was a thing of intermittence. On the whole, Humphrey was probably dearer to her because he was Humphrey than because he was her son.

It never occurred to her that there might be any unsuspected corner of his mind, anything in his character with which she was not in touch instinctively and through the mere tie of nature.

She would have been amazed, for instance, if she had known how much he thought of Linda Arnold after that one meeting with her. It surprised the young man himself indeed. He speculated upon the slight information his mother had given him as to her life and environment, and it pleased him, also, to recall her face. He saw again the rose-flushed cheeks, the slant

of the eyebrows, which gave such an expression of innocent mockery. She had looked gentle yet disdainful. Probably many men were in love with her. He wondered if, by any possibility, she could be engaged to one of them, but this supposition he dismissed impatiently.

Of course he would see her again. New York, in a sense, was small and they undoubtedly had friends in common. If they did not meet in one way, he would see that they did in another, but he would wait to test the kindliness of fate before taking matters in his own hands. Chance was kind to him, however. One evening, while he was waiting in Sherry's hall for the man with whom he was to dine, he caught sight of Linda. She recognized him at once, and the quality of her bow encouraged him to go up and speak to her. To his surprise he found that he was a little nervous. Linda in the panoply of evening dress, with bare white throat, was almost too beautiful, formidable in her beauty. And in her innocent suavity and grace, her lack of self-consciousness, her gentle *insouciance* there was a quality of perfection which seemed to set her entirely apart from him, as if she were not flesh and blood, but some exquisitely fragile work of art.

"How is your mother?" asked the girl, almost immediately, and Humphrey, with an effort, conquered his puzzling nervousness.

"Well—thank you—a little tired—nervous perhaps!"

"I'm going to see her on Wednesday," said Linda, her eyes distant and contemplative. It was evident that the time would seem long to her until then. Humphrey realized that he did not exist for her except as the son of Dioneme. But he said nothing, only continued to look at Linda fixedly as if he would wrest from her face the mystery of its beauty, and its unlikeness to the faces of all other young girls.

Just then they were joined by a tall, thin man of thirty, with fair hair parted in the middle of his narrow pointed head, a high nose, and an eyeglass.

"Do you two know each other!" he exclaimed, with amiable familiarity. "How amusing!"

Humphrey had met Walter Jackson in Paris and shunned him ever since with painstaking artifice. Now he breathed to himself a short profane comment. Of course no one could take such a person seriously! A moment later he was painfully surprised to see that Miss Arnold's manner to the intruder was of an unfeigned cordiality. They seemed to be on the footing of old friends with much in common. Humphrey reviewed hastily in his mind the facts he knew about Jackson, regretting that they were so slightly condemnatory. Certainly there was nothing definitely against

him. He was a gentleman—by birth at least—knew everybody—even the unknown.

Relinquishing the hope of finding something to be harshly criticised in Jackson's life, Humphrey was more than ever willing to proclaim the man's unattractiveness. Or was there only something antipathetic to him personally in Jackson's individuality?

"Done with the Beaux Arts, are you Wylde?" the latter asked now, with the amiability which is unconscious of showing its basis of patronage.

"It's done with me. I've been in New York for a year."

"Really!" exclaimed the other, his mind plainly elsewhere. "Stunning woman—that widow from Pittsburg," he said to Linda. "She's coming in now."

The widow with a restaurant manner of elaborate unconsciousness passed them in a glitter of steel paillettes and a whiff of strong perfume.

"She doesn't look exactly like a lady," observed Linda, with a little hesitation.

"Perhaps not—but how—exactly—would you define a lady?" asked Jackson, with an air of brilliant playfulness.

"Some one who speaks gently, tells the truth, and is never afraid," said Humphrey off-hand.

To Jackson this explanation was incomprehensible,

whether taken seriously or as a joke. His gaze roved again over the assembly.

"There come the Bertie Clarks at last!" he exclaimed to Linda, ignoring Humphrey. "Do you see them?—they're over there in that corner. You're dining with them, too, aren't you? Come along."

He swept her imperiously away, but she nodded to Humphrey, and he distinguished some vague last word —a message to his mother, of course!

A moment afterward he caught sight of the man with whom he was himself to dine, and joining him they went into the restaurant.

But he was, of a sudden, discontented and irritable, no longer hungry even. His senses rebelled against the smell and taste of food, against the banal music, and the sight of the large, over-dressed women at the table next to him, trying in varying, but universally misguided ways, to be sirens.

He could not look at Linda Arnold at all, but caught occasional unwelcome glimpses of Jackson's high, pointed head.

It was the day before Christmas before he saw the girl again. By that time she was already on a footing of something approaching intimacy with his mother. He had come from his office a little earlier than usual to find Dioneme with Linda and three men taking tea by the drawing-room fire.

The male visitors were old, young, and middle-aged respectively—easily classified, as their intelligences were on a scale with their years. They admired their hostess, with equal fervor, from their various stages of perception.

The room was filled with ribbon-bedecked baskets of flowers, offerings of the season, filling the air with strong, hot-house perfumes.

"Why need a rose-bush wear a blue ribbon because it's Christmas?" asked Humphrey, sitting down by Linda.

"It's not only on Christmas!" said the girl. "It 's all the year. Paris fashions for flowers!"

"We'll see ostrich plumes and paillettes on them, next!" observed the youngest of the three men visitors, spurring his feeble wit, as always, along the trail made by some one else—"or fur! Think of the *note* a bit of chinchilla would give to a pot of hyacinths!"

"Your mother has so many friends!" observed Linda to Humphrey. "The room upstairs is just as full of flowers as this one, and it is only the day before Christmas!"

"I think you're capable of sending them all yourself!" Humphrey said with a smile. "Sure you didn't, now?"

Linda flushed. She felt that her sentiment for Mrs. Wylde was being touched upon too lightly.

"You are most unlike your mother!" she said to

Humphrey irrelevantly and with unkind intention. "It seems strange that you should be her son." Humphrey laughed and watched Linda intently. It did not really matter what she said so long as he could sit and look at her.

Dioneme was talking about art with her oldest visitor, and had entirely forgotten to give her son his tea, but he never missed it. The shadows from the firelight—the room was otherwise very dim—quivered on Linda's delicately oval cheek.

"Are you going to let me come to see you sometime?" asked Humphrey abruptly.

Linda was startled—she didn't know why. After her recognition of Humphrey as a very good-looking young man on the occasion of their first meeting, he had ceased to exist for her, except as a casually recalled appurtenance of his mother's.

Now, surprisingly, he was proposing to become an active agent on his own account, forcing himself, unasked and not particularly desired, on her own territorial reserves.

"I should be delighted to see you," she finally said, formally and without much warmth. "I'm always at home after five."

"So I see!" replied Humphrey quizzically, looking at the clock, which pointed to quarter before six. "I will come on Wednesday."

"But that is the day after to-morrow!" exclaimed Linda, her accent still unflattering.

"To-morrow is Christmas. I didn't like to suggest coming Christmas!"

Linda's indignation (though she could with difficulty have formulated a reason for it) gave her back her presence of mind.

"I'm surprised that there was *anything* you hesitated to suggest!" she said coldly, and felt how unfortunate it was that a woman like Dioneme Wylde should have such an odious son.

But suddenly Humphrey's manner changed, and his voice grew grave. "You mustn't be angry," he said. "I'm only trying to show how much I want to see you again."

Linda looked at him squarely and was forced, though against her will, to admit that he had nice eyes —which is going a good way for a young girl!

"Where did you know Walter Jackson?" she asked, changing the subject with a gracious air of being willing to condone past offences.

"In Paris," replied Humphrey briefly.

Linda felt a sudden impulse to ask Humphrey what he thought of him—but restrained it. After all, what did any one else's opinion of Walter Jackson matter, least of all that of a comparative stranger?

"Great friend of yours?" inquired Humphrey.

"Our families have known each other always," answered Linda with dignity.

Here Dioneme discovered that Humphrey had had no tea and the sympathy for him became universal.

"Let me ring for more hot water!" volunteered the middle-aged man, dissembling his rheumatism as he hastened to the bell.

"Here's some whiskey, Wylde!" said the youngest visitor, indicating a decanter which stood on the table near Dioneme. "Your mother and I have been celebrating the season!"

"Thanks, I'll wait for the tea," he replied shortly. The hobgoblin thought, always in the back of his brain, suddenly took entire possession of him. He would have strangled it secretly, if he could, refusing to hear it, but the malign thing was too strong.

After a few moments he moved away from Linda's side, yielding his place to one of the visitors, and sat down where he could see his mother more distinctly. She and the oldest man had resumed their discussion.

"Every one defines genius," said Dioneme, "yet we never learn what it is." An unusual color burned in her cheeks, her voice was perhaps more highly pitched than usual.

"Genius is not as rare as people imagine," said the old man, looking at Dioneme as if she were only a favored and precocious child. "We see it around us

everywhere, in minute, intermittent flashes, like fireflies on a summer night. It is all lost—or most of it—goes for nothing—even an illumination!—The real phenomenon is genius as a positive and continuing force."

Humphrey wondered that no one seemed to notice how excited his mother was. When she spoke it was with a kind of reckless animation, encouraged and applauded by the admiring attention of her hearers. She talked of the futility of effort, the forever-evading dream. "There are moments," she said finally, "when I have a kind of vision—a divinity in art not yet revealed to us. I divine some standard by which all men's accomplishments, up till now, will seem pitiable. What do we know? Velasquez was puerile, perhaps, Beethoven mediocre—even Shakespeare insignificant. There may be a higher Olympus!"

Her fervor and the magnetism that was in her made what she said impressive. Only the youngest man stirred uneasily, abashed before a form of imagination he could honor but not comprehend.

"If the vision is too great it may paralyze achievement," said the middle-aged man.

"Nothing can paralyze genius," said the oldest. "For genius cannot be denied. It goes out into the world, like a child into a field of flowers, and gathers what it will. But it must never be restrained or

directed or it will lose its fresh and divine impulses. The part of its wisest guardian is only to say, at the end, 'What beautiful things you have gathered!'"

"But you—Mrs. Wylde," said the youngest man, venturing to break into the conversation, "how do you know so much about the human heart?"

"By the little lantern of Self," said Dioneme.

"By that lantern, 'Self,'" said the old man, "each individual may show us a new world."

While they talked Humphrey tortured himself with suspicion which was almost certainty. He could not take his eyes from his mother's feverish face; even Linda was no longer in his thoughts. He longed to drive away all the visitors so that he might be alone with Dioneme. Perhaps then he could persuade her to lie down and rest for a while. "Somewhere in the dark," he thought instinctively, his painful impulse being to hide her from observation. Linda's infatuation for her, and the admiration of the three men, became, little by little, unbearably distasteful to him. He watched Dioneme's animation die out and her eyes grow heavy. Finally, Linda rose to go and Humphrey went out with her to put her into her waiting motor-car. It had begun to snow and the electric street lights shone, in the early dark, through a mist of gently falling flakes. The air was indescribably soft, and one could imagine that the noises of the city were muffled,

even as its outlines were blurred, and that a strange spell of beauty and silence lay in the storm.

"Until Wednesday!" Humphrey reminded Linda as he said good-by—but even she noticed that he had changed in some inexplicable way. Now he was preoccupied, looked at her as if he were considering a separation instead of a meeting.

If she had been less under the influence of Dioneme's recent company she might have been slightly piqued, but, for the moment, there was room for but one obsession in her soul. She had the unselfish capacity for absorption in another, which makes hero-worship possible. Behind the charm of Dioneme, too, was always the charm of her books, into which the best and wisest of herself had been compressed. To meet she was, perhaps, no more than an interesting and unusual woman; in her writings there were glimpses of the seer.

When Linda had gone Humphrey did not return to the drawing-room, but went upstairs to his mother's sitting-room. From there he could hear the murmur of voices below and the empty laugh of the youngest man, helping out his wits when words, presumably, failed him.

The clock struck seven and still the talk went on. Dioneme's voice was inaudible though he strained his attention to catch it. They seemed to be amusing

themselves very well. Strange that he could not hear his mother's voice. Why was she not talking? Had she grown drowsy—what with the heat of the fire and everything?

Once again he fought with the hobgoblin thought now so much to the fore in his brain, and, with boyish contempt, characterized himself as morbid and imaginative. If he was not mistaken, he had, at all events, exaggerated. A stir and the moving of chairs in the room below indicated that the visitors were about to depart. He heard them come out into the hall, repeating their farewells to Dioneme, whom he pictured standing at the drawing-room door. Did she waver, ever so slightly, as she stood? Again the monstrous fancy leaped out at him. He must be what old-fashioned people called "possessed." Now the front door opened, a faint descendant of the cold wind which entered swept up the stairs and drifted into the sitting-room. A moment later the jovial men's voices ceased, the door closed. His mother would be coming upstairs directly now.

Humphrey felt that there was nothing for him to say to her, so he went off to his own room, paralyzed by his own uncertainties, yet, in some indefinable way, aware of the ponderous, on-moving machine of what must be.

CHAPTER V

AS before, after a violent outbreak, the hobgoblin fear ceased to trouble Humphrey for a while, and everything about him became normal and undisquieting once more.

His first visit to Linda had been the beginning of others, as was to have been expected. On the occasion of the fourth he perceived, tardily even then, that he had fallen in love with her, and set himself resolutely to the task of conquest.

There was no doubt in his mind nor hesitancy; Linda was the girl he wanted for his future wife. The thing of instant importance was to win her love. He could afford to disregard financial considerations, or so he felt, as his future was more or less assured. His father's estate had been willed entirely to Dioneme, leaving it to her to provide, as she would surely do, for their son. Moreover, Humphrey was doing well in his profession. All things pointed to prosperity in life and in love.

But presently he became aware, with some bewilderment, that there was an obstacle in his path—and that the incredible one of Walter Jackson. Twice he and Jackson had taken a grudging tea together at Miss

Arnold's table, once he had observed them chatting with intimacy and absorption in some one's opera box, and once they had ridden past him in the park, and he had felt a bit of gravel thrown up by their horses hoofs strike against his cheek.

Astounding as it seemed Miss Arnold seemed to enjoy Jackson's society. In the light of his rival's apparent successes Humphrey began to think disparagingly of his own attractions. What did it matter if ladies of the Faubourg had found him "*joli garçon et très sympathique*" (a characterization which had, indeed, always suggested a bright young barber to his mind), or what availed his subsequent modest triumphs, if Jackson was to outstrip him now!

He was feeling unusually downcast and lacking in self-confidence one day, when he suddenly met Linda as they were both coming out early from a Sunday concert at the New Theatre.

"Can I get your car for you?" he asked, when they had exchanged greetings.

"I'm walking. It's such a nice day I thought it would be pleasant going across the park."

"I can't think of anything that would be pleasanter!" said Humphrey, and the humble prayer of the true lover was in his eyes.

"Won't you come too?" said Linda in dizzying response to this look, and they set forth together.

The park was covered with a light fall of snow and every tree and shrub wore a coating of crystal ice. Fairylike blue mist veiled the hollows, purple shadows lay on the drifts under the pines and the setting sun shone palely gold in the western sky. The air was so pure and cold and still that it was more sense-stirring than the most subtle perfume. Some hardy sparrows twittered among the icicles.

"Ripping day!" said Humphrey blithely and inadequately.

He and Linda swung along the hard, frozen walks, keeping step together in an intoxicating rhythm. This was a taste of the joy of life—the girl you loved alone with you in the great, free, out-of-door world, where there was no drawing-room cunning or artificiality.

They talked about the concert. Humphrey, who was not musical, said that the orchestra, clustered around the two immense electric lamps suspended from the ceiling, had seemed to him like a swarm of giant insects, attracted by the light, humming and buzzing, beetle-like some of them, with waving antennæ of scraping bows. Linda laughed and then frowned. Had not Humphrey appreciated the wonderful song music of the second movement in Tschaikovsky's Symphony in F Minor? Humphrey listened respectfully to her opinions. Like most American men he was inclined to defer to a woman's judgment when it came

to an art of which he knew little. Linda did not talk to him of architecture.

"I've been to five concerts this last week," said the girl with naïve pride, "and to the opera two nights, and one matinée."

"You do too much," observed Humphrey. "You will wear yourself out." This hardly perceptible approach to proprietary interest gave him a thrill of joy.

"Do I look worn out?" asked Linda with some coquetry.

Humphrey turned so that he could take a better view of his companion and bent slightly toward her.

Slim and strong and radiant, with cheeks like the petals of a rose, she looked at him with sweet, challenging eyes.

"You look like the morning of the world," he said impulsively, and her eyes fell.

When they reached Linda's house they found her sister and Walter Jackson in the drawing-room. Linda's sister was forty, plain of face, but perfect of figure, consummately well-dressed, with no originality whatever. She had pale, kind eyes, a very long, straight nose, and was called Julie (having been christened at a period when only names ending in *ie* were thought pretty and feminine). Her interests in life were Linda, the town and country houses, the Sarah Emmons Mission for Seamen and the giving and attending of din-

ners. Her father, though near to her most of the time in the flesh, had succeeded in removing himself from her sphere as far as volition and action were concerned, so he is not included. As Linda and Humphrey entered the room it was caught in a glowing mesh of varying lights: rose flicker of the fire, white glow from the lamps, the setting sun pouring in a golden flood through the still uncurtained windows—all crossing and melting into each other until, with the flush of the roses and azaleas everywhere, there was a very riot of color and radiance.

The perfume of flowers, the faint aroma of tea, and the odor of Jackson's cigarette were in the air. On the hearth lay Linda's Irish terrier.

The Arnolds had moved up-town from their old house on Thirty-eighth Street only three years before, moved by the instinct which impels New Yorkers ever onward. Their new house faced the park, and from its windows they looked out over the old reservoir, which in its age and retirement from active duty was sometimes known as a lake. Sea-gulls flew in from the ocean to rest on the calm blue surface of this lake, or rose to sweep above it in circles, gleaming snow-white in the sun. On stormy days the waters lashed themselves into an imitation of fury, and dashed, gray-green and tipped with foam, against the artificial banks, and when it grew cold this pretence of a lake

was frozen over, irregularly and with hummocks and cracks and crevices like a miniature Polar Sea.

Around it ran a path and below that a bridle road. Lower still was the carriage-drive and the walk, and then came the street level and the asphalt of Fifth Avenue. Looking up from the Arnolds' front door, the whole had the effect of some complicated mechanical toy, the motors and omnibuses and drays moving along the avenue, then the nurses and perambulators and tramps on the park walk, then the smoothly rolling victorias and hansoms, then, higher still, the galloping horses, working with a stiff, jerky motion against the sky-line, and, finally, drolly silhouetted, the earnest pedestrians who were making the tour of the reservoir for a constitutional. All this motion seemed to have been started by some hidden spring; one felt that at any moment it might run down and have to be wound up again; as if, some day, all these amusing little men and women and horses would get out of order and be unable to go through their automatic motions.

When it came to furnishing their new house the Arnolds found themselves embarrassed. On Thirty-eighth Street they had lived comfortably and envied by their neighbors among the chairs and tables, the bibelots and oil-paintings accumulated before 1890.

But their architect and decorator was conscientious and determined; Louis the Sixteenth was his god and

he acknowledged no other. The new house must be a Louis Sixteenth house. So the old-gold upholstered satin furniture, the inlaid chairs, the malachite tables, the carved mahogany dining furniture, the painting by Vibert, the Dresden china, and the piano lamps vanished to adorn the homes of country relations, and the Arnolds moved into a perfectly complete, harmonious, and, it must be admitted, beautiful abode.

If Walter Jackson was annoyed at seeing Humphrey he was too consciously a man of the world to show it. Nevertheless, he made a mental note of his entrance with Linda and marked it as important and something to be seriously considered. For Jackson had picked out Linda as, taking everything altogether, the wife who would be most what he wished. She was rich, of the best family and position, good-looking, and what was more important, healthy, amiable and, he thought, not too clever, which is to say eccentric. In short, she would in every way advance his own importance in New York, and be not too disagreeable a drag on him personally. Carefully as he prepared himself for every new step in life, Jackson made ready for matrimony. He had little doubt of his success, once he seriously began to make love. He was experienced with women and attractive and distinguished personally, with his tall, thin blondeness, his smoothly shaven face, and his eye-glass. Rivals, however, would be very unwelcome

to him, and while he did not really think seriously of Humphrey as a rival, he felt that he was not an altogether negligible factor. Jackson moved along the lower altitudes of life with a calmness of judgment which was as good as intellect, and a steadiness of purpose as great as genius. To be rich and influential in New York society was his aim, and everything was sacrificed to its attainment. Had he ever given way to an unfashionable impulse? No one knew. Was he capable of a passion? His acquaintances asked it of each other in their moments of psychological research and found no reply. Everywhere they went they encountered Walter Jackson, carefully dressed and imperturbable, with perfect manners and a ready smile. He was, though non-essential, a part of New York. His business was in Wall Street; he belonged to a firm of small conservative brokers. In commercial and down-town circles he was regarded as a "safe" young man and a hard worker. Financial magnates approved of him ponderously while admitting he would never dictate to corporations.

As he and Linda, Julie and Humphrey sat around the tea-table together the latter was convinced that of such a company nothing could come but a probably painful and fruitless effort to make interesting conversation. After a short stay, therefore, he removed the large spongy paws of "Paddy," the terrier, from

his lap and rose to go. No one tried to detain him. Linda, inevitably, sent a long message to his mother, and he found himself again in the wintry streets which were now growing dark. He stopped in at his club, had a glass of soda with his friend, Norris Peters, who was, as he expressed it, "on the water wagon," and reached home at half-past seven. All the time, even while he was discussing the advantages of metallic door trims for school-houses and office-buildings with Peters, his whole being was filled with a sense of Linda, the grace and sweetness of her, the high spirit and the innocence. At the thought of her soft, curved mouth, a thrill went through him. He had never been in love before—at any rate, not like this!

When he reached home he found Dioneme at her writing-table. Amid billows of proof-sheets she was unusually and conventionally established on a small island of silver-edged blotting tablet, answering notes.

"Is that you, Humphrey?" she said, looking up, plainly worn and irritated with her task. "Do you want to dine with old Miss Godwin on the twenty-third? I do not, but, as she is giving the dinner for me, I suppose I must go."

"Why not have her give the dinner for you with you absent?" said Humphrey. "Like one of those memorial services where there is no corpse, you know."

But Dioneme was not in a mood for fantasy. "Will

you go or not?" she repeated with determined concentration.

"Yes, I'll go. Who is Miss Godwin?"

"But surely you remember Miss Godwin, my dear boy!" said Dioneme, who never remembered any one.

"You mean the old lady who lives in one of those big, ancient houses on Irving Place?"

"Yes. She knows everybody, all sets, I mean, the simply clever and the simply fashionable; the fashionable people who are clever and the clever people who are fashionable."

"Does she have a kind of salon?" asked Humphrey.

"Not as bad as that! Women's salons seem to me so often only sensuality in an intellectual mask. I expect Circe had the first."

Dioneme finished her note while Humphrey smoked a cigarette in silence, turning over the leaves of a book he picked up from the table.

"Oh!" said his mother finally, observing him, "That's rather a good book, that life of George Sand. I was reading it this afternoon."

She kindled into vivacity, left free to take up a subject which really interested her. "Of course, it is mostly about her love affairs. Isn't it strange, when you come to think of it, that the people of to-day are so much more interested in George Sand's lovers than in her novels?"

"About as many of one as of the other, weren't there?" said Humphrey.

"It's a sad comment," went on Dioneme—"the woman's outliving the author, as if to be merely woman were best!"

She fell into one of her sudden, deep reveries, from the look on her face a painful one. Humphrey watched her with a new curiosity, clairvoyant all at once and freed from the banal perception imposed by relationship. She sat with the silver handle of her pen just touching her lips, her deep eyes fixed on the outside dark. Dressed in one of Mariano Fortuny's painted gowns, which fell around her in folds of dim blues and purples, bordered with strange designs in gold, a mysterious gown which seemed all twilight and stars, she impressed him more than ever before with her beauty and her curious charm as a personality. He wondered if her genius itself ever hampered her, clung around her feet like a heavy and cumbrous garment; if she ever longed for the naked and primeval, to be swayed by unthinking passions, untortured by the intellect, submissive to man's unquestioned will. Did she ever think regretfully of her own beauty, and how it was burning itself out? Was she tortured by visions of simple Pagan women, passionate and unashamed? Or was she simply a creator, one of those exotic creatures, born to feel more than others, perhaps, but, in the

need of reproducing that feeling in art, to lose it utterly. Was she unmoral in her remoteness from any personal imprint from experience, whether good or evil?

Humphrey felt that only he, at that moment, perceived her power, as only he knew her weakness. Yet the sum of the two remained uncertainty, and he was seized with a kind of foreboding. He realized that this woman (she seemed so distant just then that he instinctively avoided the human thought of "mother") stood between him and the world, even as he must, unquestioningly, stand between the world and her.

CHAPTER VI

DIONEME was late in dressing on the evening of Miss Godwin's dinner. When she finally joined Humphrey in the hall, muffled in furs, for it was a cold night, he had not seen her since the morning. They entered the waiting carriage and were driven hurriedly and for the most part in silence to Irving Place. When they entered Miss Godwin's drawing-room it was full of people; plainly they were the last and it was to be a large dinner.

Humphrey looked around him and saw that his mother had given a truthful account of their hostess's catholic tastes in entertaining. He recognized Mrs. Claypool West, known as one of the leaders of New York society to all those who were not in it. Under her elaborately coiffed white hair her eyes, like those of a wise, tired old monkey, gleamed dully. Near her was Mrs. Loring Grey, who was not clever enough to have friends as clever as herself and so was always bored. She had the perfect New York manner—a compound of suavity, languour, and ice.

Dr. Trageser, an unfashionable professor of physics from one of the universities, talked deferentially to a

steel millionaire, recently passed on by Pittsburg to New York, and the latest French portrait painter struggled to escape from a lean, amorous-eyed spinster, last of an old Knickerbocker family, who supported herself by making hats and read Pierre Louys in secret.

Humphrey had gone so far in his survey of the room, when he caught sight of Linda Arnold, standing, star-like, near the fireplace. He went over to her at once.

"I noticed you when you came in with your mother," she said. "I never dreamed she was to be here to-night—what a joyful surprise! Now the evening will be worth while!"

Not for the first time the girl's absorption in his mother grated on Humphrey.

"You are easily pleased and excited," he said with an accent of disapproval, though his eyes resting on her face spoke only infatuation. "You are very young." Now, there is nothing, except telling an old woman that she is old, as insulting as telling a very young one that she is young.

Linda ignored the look in Humphrey's eyes and answered his words, as she felt they deserved, with spirit.

"I am old enough to know my own mind," she said. This sounded well in spite of its vagueness. Just then they perceived that the couples were solemnly forming to go in to dinner.

"Sorry I'm not to take you in," said Humphrey. "I'd convince you you didn't know your own mind at all." His speech was as vague as hers, but left her with a tremulous sense of masculine power over her sex. He departed in search of Mrs. Stebbins, whose named adorned the narrow white card in his waistcoat pocket. Mrs. Stebbins, when found, with the aid of a mutual friend, turned out to be an elderly flirt, with dyed hair and painted eyebrows, who smiled perpetually, showing long, brilliant, white teeth. Humphrey's distress was further increased by the fact that at the table he sat on the same side as Linda, so could not even look at her. His mother was opposite, a few places down. While Mrs. Stebbins opened a brisk campaign by inquiring if he didn't think some people much easier to get acquainted with than others, Humphrey looked at Dioneme, casually at first, then with a kind of foreboding anxiety. Her face wore the flush he already knew and she was talking intimately, almost confidentially, with the old gentleman on her right.

The latter was a conservative member of the Union Club, a vestryman of Trinity Church, and prominent on the boards of many influential societies.

His eyes rested on Dioneme's face with an expression of admiration and puzzled attention. Clearly he was saying to himself, "This is a handsome woman, but there is something I don't understand about her."

Humphrey, in the midst of his uneasiness, smiled at the thought of Colonel Livingstone Irving's trying to understand the author of "Hilmer Brothers."

Sherry was served with the soup, and the champagne almost immediately afterward. Humphrey watched his mother as she raised the glass to her lips and his sensation of foreboding grew to sickness of heart. He was conscious of Linda, watching a little farther down the table, and of all the indifferent, idle, curious people, eager for a new bit of gossip to repeat at other dinner-tables.

Mrs. Stebbins, who had been momentarily engaged by her neighbor on the other side, now turned her teeth on Humphrey with a smile of determined coquetry.

"I hear you are the son of Mrs. Wylde, the writer," she said. "Is she here to-night? Do point her out to me! I'm so excited!"

Humphrey indicated where his mother was sitting. The butler was just refilling her champagne glass.

"I think she is perfectly beautiful," gushed Mrs. Stebbins, "such wonderful eyes and hair—and such a profile! So young too! It doesn't seem possible that you can be her son!"

"We grew up together," said Humphrey. And Mrs. Stebbins screamed with laughter.

"Oh, how witty you are! You are really *too* witty —now I know that you must be her son!"

The dinner began to be more animated. Where Dioneme sat the conversation was becoming general. She was too much of a celebrity to be left entirely to old Livingstone Irving, and she was evidently in her best vein, for people around her were listening eagerly. But her champagne glass was often refilled and Humphrey felt that he could not longer sit and watch.

The time had come for him to do something—what, he did not know—but inaction was impossible. At any moment old Irving's shrewd eyes might perceive that his neighbor's vivacity was a little unnatural, or Dioneme herself might lapse into the heavy drowsiness which would betray her.

"I remember when I read your mother's novel, 'Doane Beach,'" said Mrs. Stebbins. "It seemed to me I was reading the story of my own life, and curiously enough a friend of mine said to me once that I was like the heroine. You remember the heroine, don't you? Her name was Elizabeth. Now, does it seem to you—as a stranger—just as a first impression, that I am like her?"

"I think you never could have done what Elizabeth did," replied Humphrey. "You are too feminine. He hardly knew what he was saying, but Mrs. Stebbins was delighted.

"That is it," she exclaimed. "How strange that

you should have understood me at once! There is something almost uncanny about it! Yes. I *am* too feminine, too warm-hearted and trusting, but in other ways I am exactly like Elizabeth. Do you remember her gray-green eyes?"

"Yes," said Humphrey vaguely but politely. He whispered a word to the footman, who was at that moment presenting to him a dish of fresh asparagus. The man vanished, but presently came back and murmured something in Humphrey's ear. No one had noticed his disappearance, but several saw him return, his delivery of a message to Humphrey, and the latter's well-simulated restrained start of surprise and dismay.

As a matter of fact what the man said was, "The letter you ask for is not in your overcoat pocket, sir."

"Excuse me for a moment, I must send a line to my mother," Humphrey remarked to his neighbor.

"Nothing has happened, I hope?" she asked inquisitively.

"I'm afraid we must slip away," he said. "I've had bad news."

He wrote on the back of a dinner card: "Have a message which makes it necessary for us to leave at once. Say a word quietly to Miss Godwin as you pass her chair."

The butler carried the missive to Dioneme and Humphrey watched her read it, change color, and look

at him apprehensively, with a frightened question in her eyes. The shock steadied her. She murmured a word or two of excuse to her neighbors on the right and left, and rose, stopping to speak to their hostess on her way out of the room. Humphrey followed her. In the hall, where they had left their coats, she took him by the arm and excitedly demanded an explanation.

"Nothing to be too much frightened about," he said reassuringly for the benefit of the maid who was helping Dioneme into her cloak. "Tell you in the carriage."

But already his mother, in spite of her still half-confused wits, had guessed his subterfuge, and her momentary alarm had given place to an unnatural anger. Humphrey saw that she was trembling—that she could hardly control herself until they were out of the house and on their way home.

When she began to speak, finally, her voice was almost unrecognizable, but he hardly heeded what she said, feeling that it was not really his mother who talked, but some one pitiable through irresponsibility. After a time she grew rambling and incoherent until in the end her resentment wore itself out in ambiguous self-pity. Humphrey put his arm around her and drew her head down on his shoulder. As he did so he felt that there were tears on her cheek. A boyish

shame kept him silent where he would have liked to venture some word of encouragement and reassurance, but though he undoubtedly suffered, his predominant emotion at that moment was relief at having escaped from that long, glittering, argus-eyed dinner-table before his mother had betrayed herself.

Clearly she must have taken stimulant of some kind before they left home—and the champagne afterward!

He wondered if she were conscious of her own position and smarted under it. What wretchedness for her to know that he, her son, was now aware of her secret! He hated, for her sake, his own assured knowledge. Pity rushed over him and drowned other feelings. When they reached home he roused Dioneme from the apathy she had fallen into, and helped her into the house and up the stairs to her own room.

"Mrs. Wylde's maid is not in yet," said the parlor-maid. "She was told she could be out until half-past ten and it is only ten now."

"Yes, I know," said Humphrey. "We came home earlier than we expected. Tell Parker, when she comes in, that Mrs. Wylde will not need her to-night."

"Very good, sir," said the servant and departed, wondering a little.

Humphrey helped his mother into a loose dressing-gown. She was very quiet still and seemed exhausted, with the vague, loose motions of a convalescent.

Humphrey put her into a low chair and forced himself to talk, cheerfully, about trivial things. But his mother made no response, seeming not to hear him.

"Where is Parker?" she murmured at last, reiterating gently, like an ailing child, that she wanted Parker to come and put her to bed.

Humphrey went to the window and drew aside the curtains, looking out at the night as if it held the answer to riddles. He was heavy at heart, though it was not courage or determination that failed him, but judgment. He was conscious now of his youth and inexperience—probably a first sign of the loss of both.

But surely it needed only the right word of appeal! Once aroused to the necessity his mother, with her insight into truth and the force of will which, hand in hand with creative force, had made her what she was, would be strong enough to save herself. She had not perceived her danger, had not yet realized the depths into which she was sinking.

He turned impetuously—eager to make the appeal at that moment, feeling himself suddenly and irresistibly armed with the eloquence of love and conviction, but Dioneme had dropped into a heavy sleep and lay in her chair, inert.

Humphrey drew the curtains again, and went out of the room. How foolish he had been to think of mak-

ing any impression on her to-night. He must wait until she was entirely herself again. No matter what came now, and in his renewed discouragement he felt inclined to count the worst as the most probable, his mother must be protected from the world. No one should ever suspect her weakness. This he swore to himself grimly.

The next morning Linda came early to ask after Dioneme. Miss Godwin had said casually, the night before, that Mrs. Wylde and her son had bad news of the serious illness of a relative, and so explained their sudden disappearance. As no one wished to endanger the gayety of the dinner by dwelling on melancholy topics, the matter had been allowed to drop, but Linda was full of anxiety and interest.

At the Madison Avenue house she saw only Emma Cooper, who was sitting idly in the morning-room, awaiting the allotment of her day's work.

"Good-morning," she said, when Linda was shown in. "You'll have to wait some time, I guess, if you want to see her. She isn't up yet."

"Mrs. Wylde isn't ill, is she?" asked Linda, alarmed. "Was it very bad news she had last night?"

"I don't know anything about last night. Mr. Humphrey came in here before he went away, about an hour ago, and said she was very tired and wanted to

sleep late this morning and not be disturbed until she rang. What did you mean about bad news?"

Linda briefly related the events of the dinner.

"Hm!—guess it was a false alarm. Mr. Humphrey didn't mention anything." But Miss Cooper's curiosity was aroused and she speculated some time on what the news might have been.

"I had a bad enough time myself last night," she remarked finally.

"How was that?" asked Linda, and Miss Cooper, needing little encouragement, plunged into a recital which seemed to Linda, ignorant as she was of the future, both tedious and irrelevant.

"Why, that little Flora Kelly, the manicure, (you remember I told you about her, she boards in our boarding-house), was dreadfully sick. Mrs. Mindelbaum and I were up most all night with her. The other boarders were real cross at breakfast because they said we kept them awake moving around, heating water and so on. She got cold and it settled on her stomach, I guess. They all hate little Kelly or perhaps they would have been more sympathetic. I don't care much for her myself, but when you see everybody down on a person you just take up for them naturally. She's a pretty creature, but so slack, her hair always coming down and hanging about her face in strings, and her petticoat showing below her skirt,

and her shirtwaist riding up in the back. And you should have seen her dirty little feet when we put the rubber hot water bottle to 'em!"

"Is she better this morning?" asked Linda. It was not the first time that she had been made familiar with life in Mrs. Mindelbaum's boarding-house.

"Oh, yes, she's all right," said Emma cheerfully. "She ate a soft-boiled egg for her breakfast and seemed to relish it very much. She was going to work again this afternoon. She manicures at Levy's parlors."

"She must be very grateful to you," observed Linda, looking at the clock and wondering how long it would be before she could see Mrs. Wylde.

"Oh, I don't know. She's the kind that takes things pretty much for granted," Emma replied. "She thinks a lot about the men, I guess, and about having a good time—spends all her money on clothes and going to the vaudeville theatres and the cinematograph. The Canadian nurse who boards at Mindelbaum's hints all kinds of things about her, but I never listen to that kind of talk myself. And I never cared for Lizzie Graham, anyhow. She has a great deal too much to say about the families she nurses in. No first-class nurse does that, and for my part I don't believe she ever saw the inside of the Vanderbilt's front hall, though to hear her talk you'd think she'd been brought up by them."

"I expect the little Kelly girl needs a friend badly enough," said Linda, meditating on an existence so immeasurably removed from her own.

"She hasn't many at Mindelbaum's, but it's her own fault, I guess. It's hard to have patience with her sometimes. But she's got that sort of delicate, pretty little face. I can't help taking up for her."

"You have a kind heart, Emma," said Linda gently, and the typewriter, though she gave a disclaiming snort, was secretly pleased and flattered by the approval.

Not long afterward Dioneme came in with rather an absent manner. Her eyelids were a little swollen and reddened. Linda anxiously inquired about the night before.

"I heard you had bad news," she said.

"Humphrey was unnecessarily alarmed," said Dioneme, "it turned out to be nothing, after all." She smiled at Linda, but there was something secret in her smile, which the girl felt unpleasantly. She asked no more questions; perhaps something had happened of which Mrs. Wylde was not at liberty to speak.

"What am I to do this morning, please?" asked Emma Cooper.

Dioneme unlocked the drawer of her writing-table and took from it some closely written sheets of paper.

These she handed to Emma, who retired with them into her curtained alcove.

"When did you do all that?" inquired Linda respectfully. The sight of Dioneme's work in manuscript never failed to impress her.

"Yesterday, after lunch."

"But you were so tired when I saw you in the morning!"

"I took something to strengthen me," replied Dioneme, "after that I worked very well."

"Have you ever tried strychnine?" asked Linda innocently; "my sister says it is such a wonderful stimulant."

"Dear little Linda!" said Dioneme caressingly, "you always want to help! You are like a good little house-fairy!—I will buy you a tiny green cap such as fairies wear, it will look so pretty on your bronze-colored hair!"

"But it might make me invisible," Linda answered laughing. "I don't want to be invisible!"

"Now I see you are too vain to be a house-fairy! It was all a mistake!"

Had the events of the evening before faded from Dioneme's mind? It would have been hard to tell.

When Humphrey came home that evening determined to make the plea to her courage and strength of

will which he had already resolved on, it seemed to him that she had forgotten everything.

As far as her personal emotions went she seemed, at all times, to live entirely in the present. Her joy or pain of the moment was so excessive, its interest for her so overwhelming, that there was little space left in her mind for either foresight or retrospect.

Another more worldly woman would have been concerned about the possible comments around Miss Godwin's dinner-table, but Dioneme took the world and its opinions very lightly. She went into society as a school-boy goes into his playground in the hour of recreation. The one serious and important world to her was presumably that of her own creation, wherein walked the puppets of her fancy.

The opinion of her acquaintances about her books interested her, and received due attention, but for their opinions about herself she cared not an iota.

Humphrey, once he had perceived his mother's state of mind, was wise enough to forego the appeal he had thought of making. But he was profoundly discouraged. There was no way of approaching or taking hold of her. He was dealing with a creature whose real thoughts and principles seemed as intangible and evanescent as smoke drifting through fog.

CHAPTER VII

THERE was no further manifestation of Dioneme's weakness for a long time. It even ceased to be considered in Humphrey's mind as a persistent evil, but rather as something of rare and perhaps doubtful recurrence, negligible almost in importance.

He felt free to give his energy to his office work, and in his spare moments dreamed of Linda. An obscure connection between his professional duties and the girl he loved made the former not only essential, but enjoyable. There was always the future to be thought of even when it was uncertain. When work was over Humphrey, who cared little for society as a routine and an institution, was often driven into it, like many other men, by the necessity of seeing the woman he loved. With this end in view he made ready, one evening in the middle of the winter, to attend the tableaux vivants for the benefit of the Sarah Emmons Mission for Seamen, at the Plaza Hotel. Linda's sister, as was to have been expected, was actively interested in these tableaux and Linda herself was to appear in he knew not what scene.

He arrived rather late at the hotel and could only

find a seat near the end of the big ballroom. There was no one he knew in his immediate vicinity, so he amused himself by looking around at the assembly, most of whom presented their backs to him, bare or broadclothed, according to sex. He reflected that the majority of those present had scrambled through their dinners in order to get to the Plaza in time to secure an advantageous seat, that they would be more or less bored while there, and start a stampede of exodus, if possible, before the performance was over. But that was the New York conception of social enjoyment!

The enormous room was stiflingly hot and as an epidemic of colds was raging, an irritating accompaniment of coughs and sneezes was heard to the hum of conversation. Considered from the point of view of numbers the gathering did great credit to the zeal and energy of the managers of the Sarah Emmons Mission.

"They've got all the social register here, and most of the telephone directory," a woman in front of Humphrey murmured to her neighbor.

The tableaux had been arranged by a well-known artist (socially well known) and each was supposed to be illustrative of a song to be sung by a tenor voice just before the curtains were drawn aside. They were advertised to begin at nine o'clock, but it was twenty minutes later when Schumann's "Du bist wie eine

Blume, so hold und schön und rein!" was heard and the hanging folds of red velvet parted to show, in an oval frame, the exquisite face of Hildegarde Barnard, a seventeen-year old débutante.

A storm of perfectly spontaneous applause greeted this tableau and it had to be repeated again and again until the delicate head of the poser swayed on her long, slim throat and the roses trembled in her hand.

After this came Rubinstein's "Es war ein alter König," and this was a pompous court scene, where the "junge Königin" wore all her jewels, said to be worth a million dollars (in real life she was the wife of a man designated loosely but impressively as "Standard Oil"). She was attended by Count Aldobrunetti, a large-eyed Florentine, in the person of the romantic but illy-inspired page.

This tableau was received with a more restrained approval. It was generally remarked that Mrs. Dickey, the Königin, stood as if she had been tipped back from the knees, and doubts were expressed as to the widely circulated value of the jewels. The next time it was Linda's turn. She was to be seen in an illustration of the old Neopolitan song, "Carmè." As he heard the first notes of the music Humphrey's heart beat a little faster, as it often did before a glimpse of Linda, but the tableau itself disappointed him. The pose and the costume, he felt, did not do Linda

justice. It was not the part to have chosen for her. She could have been the interpreter of some dainty French madrigal of the eighteenth century, or perhaps of something as remote from that as Burns's "Mary Morrison." Her personality would have lent itself to either.

But the audience did not seem to share Humphrey's opinion, for "Carmè" was loudly applauded.

When each tableau was over, the impersonator came out of the improvised greenroom to mingle with the audience, and this gave the occasion a pleasant aspect of informality and intimacy. One might almost forget he had aided the Seamen's Mission to the extent of a five-dollar ticket, and imagine he was in the Plaza ballroom by invitation.

Humphrey waited until he saw Linda come down the steps beyond the stage, descend the long aisle near the wall, and join some friends on the other side of the room from where he was sitting. Then he rose and went across to speak to her. The face she turned to him, stiff with paint and powder, was strange and startling to him. She was astonishingly, dazzlingly pretty, but all this artifice, the blackened eyes, the showy costume, gave to her innocent distinction a suggestion of perversity, troubling and disconcerting.

"Una rosa più bella non v'è," he said to her, quoting from the song.

"But this 'Carmè' doesn't understand Neapolitan," flashed back Linda, half sorry for her ignorance, stimulated into an unusual coquetry by the excitement of the evening, and perhaps by the fantastic, half-disguise of her costume.

"Won't you say it in English?"

"Sometime—undoubtedly. But don't you want to sit down?" He looked around him. "There are two chairs just behind us, at the very end of the room —you won't see anything, though!"

"It doesn't matter," said Linda, "I've seen more than enough of these tableaux at rehearsal—but what about you?"

"A longer view of 'Carmè' is what I want," Humphrey answered. "*All* that I want!"

They sat down in the place he had indicated and found themselves in a warm isolation, as odd as it was complete, with compact masses of humanity forming a bulwark around them. They were cut off from the least glimpse of what was taking place on the stage and were themselves almost invisible and quite unheeded.

And this detachment from the rest of the world, Linda's nearness and exaggerated, unfamiliar beauty, the perfume of the scarlet carnations she wore in her hair, the gleam of coquetry in her eyes, stirred Humphrey's senses. He was seized with a desperate long-

ing to touch this small alluring creature, to feel under his fingers the silken texture of her skin, the softness of her hair, to break down at a rush all barriers between them and take her at once in his arms, without all the long preamble of courtship and polite attention decreed by convention.

For one mad instant he forgot entirely where he was perhaps, and Linda must have divined a little of all this from the way he looked at her, for she found speech difficult and could only play nervously with her fan. She was aware that her pulses, too, were beating a little faster. What had changed Humphrey of a sudden? He had become a new person, dominating, disturbing. She was curiously, and not disagreeably conscious of his nearness to her, and of the strength in his elastic but rather thickly set figure. His thick black hair, and his short-lashed, steady blue eyes also gave her a strange sense of pleasure.

Touched by an old magic, these two young people were momentarily drawn perilously close to each other.

The shock to the girl was abrupt and incomprehensible, though to Humphrey it came as the culmination of a sentiment which had been born at his first sight of Linda.

Mastering himself a little he leaned over and took the girl's fan from her. But his fingers shook and before he knew it the sticks of the fan snapped in his hold.

"Never mind!" said Linda, trying to speak naturally. "It's of no value—'Carmè' couldn't afford expensive fans, you know."

She felt as if her own voice came to her from a long way off and there was a humming in her ears, but she tried to raise her eyes and look Humphrey carelessly in the face. It was of no use, his gaze held hers with something so bold, so insistent yet caressing, that she hastily turned her head away again, frightened at she knew not what.

In her trouble and shyness he read a hope, almost a promise, and grew suddenly confident. It was enough for the moment—he would ask nothing more—this was not the time nor the place.

Linda, when she reached home that night and was at last alone, in bed and trying to sleep, went over and over the little scene. What had been said or done? Nothing—yet her cheeks burned now at the memory, her nerves were in a tumult. Something of significance had happened. Humphrey Wylde had changed, she had changed, the whole world had changed. Yet what did she really know of Mrs. Wylde's son? He was almost a stranger to her. Was this strange feeling of intimate knowledge only an hallucination or was it real? She felt—poor child!—as if she were trying to seize and inquire into the substance of a flying shadow. She was baffled and tormented by her very attempts

at self-analysis, and still Humphrey's long look seemed to burn through her and she lay, until nearly daylight, sleepless, not knowing whether what she felt was pain or joy.

The next morning she was to have gone to see Dioneme, but a new self-consciousness made her feel that such a visit was, just at that moment, impossible. She telephoned, therefore, to say that she could not keep her engagement. Irrationally enough she felt guilty of an infidelity to the mother in having dwelt too long on thoughts of the son. As an obscure expression of remorse she took Dioneme's last book from the shelf and sat down to reread it. While she was thus occupied she happened to think of the trivial circumstance that neither Humphrey nor his mother had ever been asked to dine with them. Such an oversight struck her as inconceivable—for she had been strictly trained to conventional observances. How had it occurred?

She went at once to her sister's room and found Julie sitting in front of her writing-table. An engagement calendar was on her right hand and on her left a box divided into compartments labelled respectively, "bills," "letters," "invitations," "charities," and "circulars." Neat packages of papers, held together by india-rubber bands, lay before her on the table, and the chef's *menu* book was under her immediate

scrutiny. Julie was in the very thick of her morning employments. She looked up, inquiringly, with her eye-glasses balanced on her long, aristocratic nose, as Linda entered.

"I thought you were going out?"

"So I was—but I decided not to, after all. When are you giving your next dinner, sister?"

"Let me see!" said Julie, meditatively, turning over the leaves of the engagement calendar; "I think it is on the 30th, yes, Friday, the 30th, and I want you, too, Linda; there are some younger people coming —Jim Strong and his wife, Walter Jackson, and the Stevenson boy."

"I wish you would ask Mrs. Wylde and her son, if you have room. They've never dined here—and they must think it so rude of us!"

Even as she spoke it flashed through Linda's mind how little attention Dioneme paid to social considerations; to picture her brooding over the fact of not receiving any particular invitation was absurd. And Humphrey was almost as nonchalant. No, it was not on their account that she saw the sudden and pressing necessity of their being asked to dinner, it was because she herself, for some indefinable reason, felt it well to establish formal relations between the two families.

Julie, meanwhile, kept her brows bent in anxious reflection. She had never been able to entirely ap-

prove Linda's intimacy with Mrs. Wylde, but had looked upon it as a girl's infatuation which would soon pass. Most careful inquiry had given her no real reason for interfering with this friendship. Mrs. Wylde was eccentric—a literary genius—not exactly in their own restricted circle, but there was nothing whatever to be said against her. Her husband, it appeared, belonged to one of the oldest New York families, and the son was quite all he should be and a member of a good club. In spite of these assurances, with which she often fortified herself, Julie had still a dim distrust of Mrs. Wylde's influence on her younger sister. Now she was asked not only to countenance, but to publicly approve this association by asking the famous writer to dinner. It was a thing which required earnest thought and consideration.

The smallest matter was often to Julie of great, even spiritual, significance. She was not, as she seemed, perhaps, absorbed in the commonplace, but groping blindly toward philosophy.

Through as simple a thing as the renunciation of her morning coffee she struggled, self-consciously, with the intricate question of power of habit as opposed to suggestion; and the choice between a summer in Europe and one with her old aunt at Lenox brought her face to face with the vast mystery of will and predestination.

It will be seen, therefore, that the question of inviting Mrs. Wylde to dinner would not be disposed of lightly. To gain time she affected to be absorbed in a study of her dinner list, until at last Linda grew a little impatient.

"But, surely, you know, sister, whether you have room for two more or not!" she exclaimed.

"We are twenty already," replied Julie, "and there are only twenty of those old Dresden desert plates."

"But you've often had twenty-two or twenty-four. What does it matter about the old Dresden! Let them use something else."

"Mrs. Williamson *may* drop out," went on Julie meditatively. "I heard last night at the tableaux that she was ill with *grippe* and that it might develop into pneumonia at any minute."

Linda's usual gay good-nature seemed to have failed her that morning, for she found her sister's slow deliberations unbearably irritating.

"Let me know to-night what you decide—will you, please?" she said at this point, and hurried out of the room, fearing that she might be betrayed into some expression of her impatience.

In the end Mrs. Wylde and Humphrey were invited and accepted with commendable promptness. In the interval between this and the dinner itself Linda saw both her friends several times, but Humphrey, in spite

of his efforts, could never find himself alone with her. With inborn feminine skill the girl avoided this solitary meeting, the thought of which filled her with a kind of terror. Then the inexplicable would perhaps be explained, and she preferred to wander, not unhappily, in her present limbo of doubt and self-questioning and timorous remembrance.

Though she and Humphrey had fancied themselves unnoticed on the night of the tableaux, Walter Jackson, never unobservant, had caught a glimpse of them, and their very apparent absorption in each other's society had confirmed him in an old suspicion.

He felt certain now that young Wylde was not only a rival, but a serious one. Fortunately he had the greatest confidence in his own abilities. He was, he felt, more experienced and more subtle than Humphrey, besides he had more weapons with which to work.

Love, as a sentiment, was not much in his line of thought. Otherwise he might have reflected that when it once enters the field it wins victories, though ignorant and unarmed.

There were two relations of the sexes, according to Jackson's classifications: The first, marriage (when advantageous) was a duty to oneself and, if put grandiloquently, to the State. It advanced a man's consideration and importance.

The second, mere gratification of the senses, was a thing apart, of no emphasis, the common pastime.

Beyond this his imagination did not go. At first glimpse Humphrey, as an admitted rival, offered regrettably little opportunity for honest detraction. There was nothing to be learned against him and (which was even more unfortunate—ridicule being more potent than slander) he was not an easy figure at which to poke fun. He took himself with such cheerful lightness that humor, who prefers a solemn, even pompous, mask, found herself at a loss.

But Jackson did not begin his campaign with despair. He had learned the immense value of being able to wait, and when even a dull man learns this he becomes formidable. In the meantime he was anxious to find out how far Linda's interest in Humphrey was already engaged, and to this end, when they next rode together in the park, he led the conversation to the subject of the Wyldes.

Jackson was at his best on a horse. He had a good seat, and his long, lean figure showed to advantage. The knowedge of this gave him even greater confidence in himself and his power to make himself master of the situation.

"I've been reading one of Mrs. Wylde's books lately," he remarked, as they walked their horses

around the reservoir, after a long trot. "Very clever I thought."

There was no surer way to his companion's attention—and he knew it. Privately he considered all novels, except detective stories, about as stimulating as tepid and unseasoned soup.

"Which one did you read?"

"Let me see—I think it was called 'Doane Beach'—or something like that—I can't for the life of me remember the names of books—but I remember the story of this well enough!" he added hastily, observing Linda's look of surprise. "You see a lot of the author, I believe. She must be a wonder!"

"There's no one like her," said Linda. "She is like a witch and a queen and a little child all at the same time—and so beautiful—one could drown in her eyes!"

"Hm!" said Jackson, faintly ironical, "must be a fine woman! Do you find young Wylde at all like her?"

"Absolutely different," replied Linda shortly. She realized that Walter had found her girlish and sentimental.

"I was talking with a man who knew them both the other day," continued Jackson. "He said that the son was a very clever fellow and that, in certain ways, his mother is entirely under his influence—that he

makes all her business contracts for her, arranges her hours for work and plans all appointments with people who wish to see her. Curious—isn't it!"

"I don't think it's true," said Linda, speaking with what seemed to Jackson too great an acquaintance with the habits and characteristics of the Wylde family.

"Well—of course you know better than I," he replied. "I'm only repeating what I heard—bad habit, I know, but, after all, our fellow-creatures are more interesting than anything else. This man who was talking to me said that old Mr. Wylde—the father—left everything when he died to his wife and that Humphrey was quite dependent on her. He seemed to think it was quite natural that the son should try to get as strong an influence over the mother as possible, with an eye to the future."

"Sometimes I hate this world!" exclaimed Linda suddenly. She touched her brown mare on the shoulder and broke into a gallop. Jackson went flying after her around the reservoir. The mud from the soft, spongy ground spattered up from under the hoofs of the horses, and the cool, damp air blew hard in their faces and whipped Linda's cheeks into a flaming scarlet. A wisp of her hair came loose and blew out from behind her ears, the blood rushed through her veins with an exhilaration, which made her for a moment for-

get everything annoying. She saw some sea-gulls that flew screaming into the air from the reservoir and circled over their heads, and she smelt the odor of wet earth and of saddle-leather. Walter Jackson looked at her with unemotional approval. How strong and vigorous she was—what a thoroughbred! Just the girl he wanted for a wife. She would do him credit, and there would be no nervous prostration or doctor's bills. They would be in the smart younger set, and their names—his unusually stimulated imagination pictured them printed in the papers, "Mr. and Mrs. Walter Jackson"—would be known over the entire country.

He felt that he had made a mistake in seeming to criticise Humphrey to her, and that he must put himself right.

"That fellow I was telling you about," he said, when they settled down to a walk again, resuming their conversation where it had been left off, "tried to fill me up with a lot more information about the Wyldes, but I shut him off. I think, with you, there's too much mean gossip in the world. I like Humphrey, too—liked him when I knew him in Paris. He's not at all a bad sort. I don't quite agree with you about the mother, perhaps. She's a genius—but odd—got too much what they call 'temperament' for my taste!"

"Genius is rarely understood," observed Linda somewhat loftily.

"Which means I'm too coarse and commonplace to understand it!" said Jackson laughing. "Well—you're right there!"

Linda liked him for his good temper. She felt that she had not treated him very well that morning and exerted herself now to be agreeable, so that the rest of their ride passed pleasantly.

CHAPTER VIII

HUMPHREY, on his way to his mother's room on the night of the Arnolds' dinner, met Parker, the maid, carrying a tray with a half-filled decanter of cognac and an empty glass.

His long-dormant fears sprang up again to life. "I hope Mrs. Wylde is not ill, Parker?"

The woman looked at him with a perfectly expressionless face. Her voice when she spoke was low-pitched and deferential.

"Oh, not really ill, sir, but she had a slight nervous chill and thought a little cognac might do her good."

Humphrey started to reply, but checked himself and studied Parker's face with more attention than he had ever before given it, though she had been in his mother's employ for four years. She was an English woman and looked about forty. Her scanty brown hair was worn parted and brushed smoothly back and her thin but stocky figure was always very neatly dressed in black. She had insignificant hazel eyes and a wen on her forehead.

Humphrey decided that she looked, as she always seemed, honest and discreet.

"I'm not sure that cognac is good for nerves, you know," he said finally.

A shade of something like embarrassment crossed the maid's face and she shifted her glance.

"It's what I often tell Mrs. Wylde, sir," she replied.

Humphrey, convinced anew and most distressingly of the need for watchfulness and care in regard to his mother, felt that here, perhaps, he might find a humble ally. Sometime he might venture to say a few words to her which would show her plainly her mistress's condition, but, for the moment, the idea of putting himself in confidential relations with a servant was distasteful to him. It seemed to savor of disloyalty to his mother. He did not yet realize that Parker might know more of her state than he did himself.

He went on to Dioneme's room, full of painful apprehension, and found her lying on a low couch in front of the fire relaxed as if from extreme exhaustion. Her hair, carefully dressed by Parker a few minutes before, was already disarranged. Through her unfastened Japanese dressing-gown of blue silk embroidered with dragon-flies he saw her white delicate throat. She looked up at him with heavy, indifferent eyes and he saw at once that the dinner was not to be thought of. Would there be a difficult moment of persuasion? But no, Dioneme made no attempt at

resistance, fell in at once with his proposal that they should not go.

"Did Parker tell you how ill I felt?" she asked vaguely. "I was so cold. It seemed to me I could never get warm. But now I am better. I should like to sleep."

Humphrey bent over her and laid his hand on her forehead. "You have no fever," he said, rebelling at this pretence. The scent of amber came to him from his mother's draperies, but through it he could detect the vapors of the cognac. His blue eyes grew a little stern. "I will go and telephone to Miss Arnold," he added; "they will think us rude, but it can't be helped." As he went out of the door he heard Dioneme's heavy breathing. She was already asleep. After he had sent his message Humphrey went to his own room and shut himself in. What was Linda thinking of him? He had not said that his mother was ill, but simply announced that it would be impossible for them to keep their engagement. Now he asked himself why he had done this. He might so honestly have said that she was not well enough to dine out and that he could not leave her. But then Linda the next morning would have found her, probably, in the best of health and spirits. He was already pledged to perpetual deceit, if he were to keep his mother's secret. Artifice was closing in all around him like a fog,

to cut him off from all other human beings. For the rest of the world, it didn't matter. But Linda! If *she* could understand, could give him a word of pity, of understanding! Pity, so intolerable from others, would be sweet from her.

He had not seen her alone since the night of the tableaux. Twice he had been to her house, but only to find other visitors before him and others still to persistently outstay him. He had tried to read something in her eyes, but they were veiled and distant. There was nothing of that sweet trouble he had seen in them before. She had regained all her self-possession and become again virginal, tantalizing and remote. If he had only been bold enough to have taken his chance that other night! But everything had seemed so sure then, words would have seemed crude, intrusive. They had been so near to each other for a moment—and now——

Humphrey got up, lit a cigarette, and began to walk up and down the room. The floor creaked under his heavy tread and it occurred to him, though unnecessarily, that his mother, in the room underneath, might be wakened, so he sat down again.

How he had looked forward to this evening, counting on the chance of a few words with Linda. He had thought he might even sit next to her at the table. Now it was all over. She would think him ill-bred

and indifferent and he could never explain. There was the night of the Godwin dinner too! He and his mother would be soon voted socially impossible. Not that he cared, except for Linda! It was better than having people guess the horrible truth.

More and more his will concentrated itself on this essential, which was to become the motive of his entire existence. If his purpose had needed consecration there was the remembrance of his father's last words.

Meanwhile at the Arnolds' twenty minutes past eight found all the guests but Humphrey and Dioneme assembled in the drawing-room.

A slight undercurrent of impatience could be divined, though it was more or less politely hidden beneath smiles and voluble chatter. Julie, as hostess, found it hard to fix her mind on what the old man beside her was saying. Her gaze kept wandering anxiously to the door, though the trained smile of the accustomed dinner-giver remained on her lips. But Linda was more nervous than her sister. She felt as if Humphrey and his mother were her guests, and as if she were in some way responsible for them. What was keeping them? Had something happened?

At half-past eight Mrs. Harry Montgomery, who was an intimate of the house, said to Julie: "I wouldn't wait any longer if I were you. Do let us go

in!" just at that moment the butler entered with a message which he murmured discreetly in Miss Arnold's ear.

"Mr Humphrey Wylde has just telephoned that it will be impossible for Mrs. Wylde and himself to dine here this evening."

Julie's trained smile flickered for a moment on her lips as if it were on the point of being extinguished.

"How exactly like literary people!" exclaimed Mrs. Montgomery, who had caught the message and was divided between amusement and indignation. "I told you one could never depend on them. They are more casual than the English."

The word from the missing guests was repeated circumspectly around the room and met with disapproval and some amusement. It was a relief, however, to be able to go in to dinner, at last.

The two extra covers had been hastily removed, but it brought together two women who were not friendly and two men who had never met before and had nothing in common. Julie felt that the evening was a failure, and as dinners, from their social aspect, were of vast import to her, she was as distressed as she was indignant. Why had she ever yielded to Linda's desire of inviting these accidental outsiders, for, though Humphrey was a gentleman and Dioneme a celebrity, they were now fixed in Julie's mind as altogether alien.

As for Linda she was less angry than alarmed. She felt that Humphrey's short message had concealed something in the nature of a calamity, either great or small. Then that other occasion at Miss Godwin's came to her mind, and for a moment it struck her as odd and unaccountable that fatality should pursue the Wyldes when they dined out.

Walter Jackson, who sat next to her, was inclined to condone and be sympathetic. He agreed with her that something of a certain seriousness must have happened.

"I know Wylde too well to believe he would let his mother break a dinner engagement at the last moment just because she had a slight headache, or didn't feel like meeting people, or some nonsense like that! Whatever he is he isn't an inconsiderate bounder, and no one but a bounder fails his hostess at the last moment for no reason whatever. No, you'll find there is some good explanation."

"If she was ill," said Linda reasonably, "he might have come without her."

"Perhaps he didn't like to leave her," replied Jackson, who seemed determined to be Humphrey's friend.

"Yes, that's true," assented the girl with a sigh. She felt grateful to Walter and said to herself that she had never liked him so well, which was exactly the

comment he had been working for. His instinct told him that he must appeal to Linda through her imagination, and the more moral and heroic qualities he could contrive to suggest the better would be his chance with her. He had already the advantage of being an old friend, able to see her when he liked, and to judge of the tendencies of her daily life.

Linda received a letter from Humphrey by the early post the next morning. It apologized most humbly for their failure to appear at the dinner; his mother had, at the last moment, felt quite unequal to going, and had wanted him with her. He hoped that she and her sister would forgive their seeming but unavoidable rudeness, etc., etc. It was a well-written letter, but not convincing. Linda read it aloud to Julie and saw that the cold light of disapproval in the latter's eyes did not change.

Certainly the letter did not seem to supply a very adequate excuse for her friends' failure to appear at dinner. Walter's words recurred to her against her will: "No one but a bounder fails his hostess at the last moment for no reason whatever." If the whole thing had merely been one of Mrs. Wylde's caprices, and if her son had the influence over her that people said, he should have insisted on her keeping her engagement.

Of course Dioneme was different from any one else,

though; she must be permitted to be fitful and inconsistent.

But Linda wished it were not all so impossible to explain to Julie, whose friends always did what they were expected to do.

Later in the day, when she had been out for her morning ride, the matter seemed less serious to her. After all, what a fuss over nothing! But something, nevertheless, had been placed as a slight obstacle in the current that was sweeping her toward Humphrey; it had been checked in its spontaneity, turned ever so little aside.

Meanwhile her devotion to Humphrey's mother increased. She had been forced to defend her against her sister's lady-like but outspoken criticism, and in this way Dioneme had of course attained in the girl's eyes an added value.

They did not meet again until three or four days after the dinner and then on the occasion of a small tea Dioneme gave for a visiting Italian critic.

As a rule Linda preferred seeng her friend when there were no other guests. This time, however, she had expressed a desire to meet Signor Giovanni Aldi, having read with interest his brilliant studies on the early Italian painters.

Humphrey had not encountered Linda in his mother's home for a long time and had almost ceased

to expect it. He had even acquiesced in this ruling of chance, feeling, perhaps, that he did not wish to take advantage of his mother's friendship with the girl, or, more obscurely, desiring to separate himself from Dioneme in her mind, to fight on his own ground and win with his own weapons.

When he came in the drawing-room, on the afternoon of the tea, he was, therefore, astonished to find Linda standing near the window listening to Signor Aldi, who, tall and gaunt, with long dishevelled hair and a worn and not too scrupulously brushed frock coat was discoursing on the lack of art in America, and the immense futility of modern art everywhere. He was one of those people to whom the personality of the hearer is nought, and who are never hampered in their monologues by a passing doubt as to how it will be received or whether it will be comprehended or not. Signor Aldi had only one method in talking,—that of the lecture hall. He had proposed marriage to the present Signora Aldi in the same flowing and sonorous periods with which he addressed an audience of university students.

Humphrey saw that Linda was looking bewildered, and as he approached she turned to him with the look of one who, in dire straits, hails salvation.

Aldi greeted Humphrey as if he saw him not and was proceeding with his discourse when they were interrupted by an old lady, who wished to recall to the

distinguished critic the fact that she had once met him in Rome in the winter of 1894.

Humphrey and Linda made their escape and sat down in a corner by the fire.

"I am very angry with you," she said—and he thought how pretty she looked when she was angry, and how bright her eyes were—"you behaved very badly about our dinner."

"Forgive me," said Humphrey. She had expected a longer apology, explanations, excuses, but there was something so troubled yet so honest and convincing in Humphrey's look that she found herself almost exonerating him without further effort. She did not find him, at first, very talkative. He seemed satisfied to look at her, so she herself began to make conversation, impelled by an inexplicable dread of more silences between them.

"Who is that coming in now?" she asked.

"That is Dr. Macklevaine," replied Humphrey, looking at a burly gentleman of fifty-five, who was kissing his mother's hand in a manner which showed that the gesture was an entirely foreign one to him, adopted because of its discreet privileges. Dr. Macklevaine had small steel-grey eyes and his high, sharply moulded nose cut through his face like the prow of a ship and seemed to cast billows of purplish red over his fat cheeks.

"Best surgeon in town and a great admirer of my

mother's," explained Humphrey, "probably of all men on earth the one least capable of understanding her."

"Does he read her books?"

"No—hates her books because they take her time and vitality. He's Meredith's 'old dog.'"

"What do you mean by 'old dog'?"

"The 'old dog,' according to Meredith, is the lover who is the least loved, but the most faithful; who remains when all the brilliant, favoured, and fascinating ones have left; when the hero even is a thing of the past, there you have the 'old dog'!"

"Do all women have one?" asked Linda.

"*You* will," he answered.

Her lips curved in a sly smile and she looked at Humphrey with a question of some daring in her eyes.

"Oh, no!" he said promptly. "*I* shall not be the 'old dog'! I shall probably be the hero."

"You are very bold and self-assured," she replied, frowning a little.

"Heroes have to be!"

Around them the room hummed with talk and laughter, Signor Aldi's voice booming above the rest. His little wife, dressed in a black jetted silk frock, with a coral and gold brooch at her throat, stood near him. She had been told that the ladies in New York dressed a great deal, so had decided upon wearing

the black silk. It pleased her that there was nothing so elaborate in the room, all the other women guests being in dark tailor gowns, but of course it was only fitting that she, as the guest of honor, should be the most magnificently arrayed.

She listened to her husband's conversation with Dioneme about the merits of the Sassetta Polyptych in the cathedral of Asciano with tranquillity. She knew he did not admire clever women, or even beautiful ones. He thought with the German Emperor that woman's place was in the home. The plainer and duller she was the more likely she would be to stay there.

Linda, while she talked with Humphrey, was watching his mother. She was certainly unusually lovely that afternoon. Her face had the strange, luminous pallor which was a sign of health with her. She moved attentively among her guests, yet seemed immeasureably remote from them. It was as if, while she gave herself to them, they remained as individuals in darkness to her.

After she left Aldi she crossed the room to greet a new visitor, apparently an unexpected one, who had just been announced.

"Oh, *dear* Mrs. Wylde," said a sharp, insistent voice. "I didn't know you were having a tea! *Do* forgive me for coming when you were having a tea."

The new-comer, who had a keen, fox-like face, looked about the room while she spoke with eyes which noted every one. Finally her gaze fastened itself on the face of the Italian. "Isn't that Giovanni Aldi, the critic?" she exclaimed, enchanted. "Do introduce me to him!"

"What an odd woman!" said Linda, "who is she?"

"She is, to me, the most disagreeable woman in New York, and the most unsnubbable. If, in desperation, one brained her with a club she would look up in her death-agony and murmur, 'Will you dine with me next Tuesday?'"

"Don't tell me her name," Linda said laughing, "I want to forget her—but you are very cruel!" It occurred to her that Humphrey was unlike himself that afternoon, that his high spirits were assumed.

"No, it is you that is cruel." His tone grew suddenly serious. Linda did not dare to ask why. She glanced around the room again in search of a new subject for dissection.

"You keep me talking chaff when I want to be talking seriously," went on Humphrey.

"One doesn't talk seriously at an afternoon tea," said Linda, rising, driven to flight by the determination in Humphrey's eyes. "Besides I must go. It is getting late."

"When shall I see you again?" Now that she was really going Linda, perhaps, felt safer and could permit herself to be kind. At least it seemed to Humphrey that a softer light came into her eyes for a moment.

"We are to meet at the Symphony Concert, I believe," she said. "Old Miss Godwin said she was going to ask you—but if you don't care for music——"

Humphrey dismissed the question of his fondness for music.

"Old Miss Godwin's lovers never watched the post for her letters as I shall!" he said.

"Did *old Miss Godwin* ever have lovers?" exclaimed Linda, and she laughed, with the ferocious cruelty of youth holding love in its hand.

CHAPTER IX

AT the Symphony Concert they had just finished playing the last piece on the programme, Richard Strauss's "Tod und Verklärung." Once more, triumphantly, beauty had held out the "divine gift of oblivion," and the audience was still tremulous. Vague, pensive smiles quivered on those long lines of faces, a sense of confused rapture.

Humphrey sat behind Linda in a box near the stage. He had come to the hall full of anxiety in regard to his mother, despondent even before the prospect of seeing Linda.

But little by little, though ignorant of music, he found himself intoxicated by it. His fears and his heavy sense of responsibility slipped from him. He thought only of Linda, sitting so near him that if he leaned forward a little he could catch a faint, almost imperceptible, perfume like spring flowers, which came from her dress.

A wave of something he could not resist swept him on, with the symphony, to a climax of ecstasy. He waited, sitting very still and tense, for the moment when Linda would turn and look at him. At last, as he had expected, she moved her head.

"Wasn't it beautiful!" she said, almost in a whisper. There were tears in her eyes.

"Yes—" said Humphrey—then, abruptly—"it made me feel how much I love you."

The girl started and grew suddenly pale. Perhaps her nerves were still shaken by the passion of Strauss's symphonic poem. She felt it was cruel of Humphrey to speak to her at that moment, suddenly, when she was unexpectant and off her guard, but even in her resentment and alarm something in her soul responded to his voice as it had responded to the music.

She tried to answer, to protest—but her words were unintelligible.

Desperately, as if in appeal, she glanced toward the other side of the box. The two old ladies with whom they were sitting had at last risen and were chatting together as they gathered up their furs in preparation for departure; Linda also rose with a growing suggestion of panic.

"Miss Godwin, Miss Godwin," she cried appealingly. "Will you take me home in your motor? Julie has ours for all the afternoon."

She felt that she must instantly provide for herself a way of escape, be free from the spell of Humphrey's voice and eyes.

But on their way to the street he was close at her side, touching her almost, pleading in her ears:

"When can I see you? When may I come? When will you answer me?"

And he was conscious that Linda thought only of getting away from him and that he could not let her go. He seemed to actually hear her heart beating in her side; he was pursuing something wild, helpless and innocent, but something that must be his, that called to him even as it fled.

Not until Linda was safely shut in beside Miss Godwin in the motor did she feel safe. Humphrey stood at the door. Conventionality and a sense of being observed had made him his usual self again. Only his eyes were brilliant and intent.

"I shall come to-morrow," he said to Linda, as the car started, speaking as if it had been an agreement between them, and before she could reply they were borne away.

"What a nice concert!" said Miss Godwin comfortably. "That piece by Strauss was wonderful. I'm sorry the other young people couldn't come, but the Wylde boy is very agreeable, don't you think so?"

Linda agreed that he was, secretly trying to dominate her inner turmoil by repeating to herself that she never wanted to see him again. When she was removed from the personal influence Humphrey possessed over her, her vague uncertainties about him returned.

She felt that she did not know him enough, some-

thing—was it what Walter Jackson had hinted?—restrained the natural impulse she had to entirely trust him.

"Where there is no faith there can be no love," she repeated to herself, with the young girl's terrible faith in this axiom.

At first she thought she would try to avoid that interview insisted upon for the following day. Afterward, as she grew calmer, more certain of herself, she reflected that to avoid it now would be only to put it off. Better perhaps to have it over with, once for all, and behind her. Deciding this she felt very calm and worldly-wise.

But when Humphrey came he would not listen to her denial or her doubts; he masterfully pushed aside both her dignity and her scruples; he was intolerable, but, as usual, when she was with him, very nearly irresistible. Instead of sending him away a discarded and hopeless suitor, she let him go feeling that his battle was half won; instead of retiring to her own room with all the calm of maidenly self-possession, she fled to it in a pitiable rout, to bury her hot face in the sofa cushions, tingling with anger and excitement and dismay and some racking, undefined feeling, to which she could not give a name. There was but one thing left to her—flight.

The next day she announced to her sister that she

was going away—no matter where—so long as it was at once. She said she was ill, nervous, had taken a cold, was restless and bored, piled reasons upon reasons to make Julie see the necessity of an instant change of air.

"Where will you go?" asked the latter finally, with judicious deliberation. On her side she was inclined to think it might be well to send Linda out of town for a while. It would break up, temporarily at least, the intimacy with Dioneme Wylde (Julie was happily ignorant of the complications in regard to Humphrey).

"I will go to Aunt Evelyn's, at Lockton, and you mustn't let any one know where I am. I want a real rest, no bothers!"

A look of bird-like cunning came into Julie's sensible spinster countenance. She cocked her head on one side with conscious archness.

"Running from a suitor?" she asked, delighted with her perspicacity.

"No danger," replied Linda. "One has to run *after* them in New York." Shame at her own deceit colored her cheeks scarlet, and she turned to look out of the window so that her sister would not notice. But Julie had finished with playfulness, and was back in the matter-of fact.

"When do you want to start?" she asked.

"This afternoon—the 2.40 express gets to Lockton at 8. Marie can pack in no time. I sha'n't want much there."

"I don't know what father will say!"

"Oh, *father!*" Linda's accent was not disrespectful, but showed she placed no false value on herself as a factor in her parent's existence. Mr. Arnold's affection for his children expressed itself in large cheques and perfect enfranchisement. But Julie felt that her own authority as her younger sister's guardian could not be maintained except by further parley.

"What about your engagements?" she asked severely. This to her was a delicate and vital point, but Linda assured her that all her engagements could be broken painlessly as to the other contractors and without loss of her own reputation for good manners.

"Besides, I am really not well," she said, and felt it. She had spent a sleepless night, and her usual perfect physical poise was shaken. But even if she had spoken artfully she could have been no better inspired, for any hint of ill-health on Linda's part was the one thing which could entirely rout and destroy her sister's prejudices, principles, and aims in life.

If Linda had a threatening sore throat Julie was capable of putting off any number of dinner-guests, absenting herself from the annual meeting of the Board of Managers of the Mission to Seamen, wearing an

unbecoming and vulgarly cut frock and letting the *chef* indulge his Gallic fancy in unexpurgated menus. By which it will be seen that Julie had a passion, and so could never be uninteresting.

As was to have been expected, therefore, half-past two o'clock that afternoon found Linda and her maid at the Grand Central Station, ready to start for Lockton. Nothing but a suspicious, nervous haste in the young girl's motions, a somewhat feverish brightness in her eyes would have made any one suspect that it was a flight. Once or twice she looked over her shoulder, fearfully, as if she expected to see Humphrey advancing from the midst of the crowd, suddenly warned of her plan of escape by love, the sorcerer, who seemed to be his ally.

But in this case that powerful coadjutor, being, no doubt, engaged with his tricks elsewhere, failed Humphrey completely. Nothing of what was passing in the Grand Central Station, or of the necessity of his presence there, entered his mind, and Linda, still looking nervously over her shoulder for a familiar face, saw only Emma Cooper.

The typist was making her way through the jostling, unruly crowd with her usual expression of efficiency and independence. No one in looking at her could doubt for a moment that Miss Cooper would safely arrive at the place where she intended to go; it was

equally impossible to entertain any fears as to the safety of her pocket-book, her umbrella, or her hand-bag.

When she saw Linda she bowed, smiled, and hesitated a moment whether to approach or not. But the girl made a slight gesture and Emma joined her, to the obvious disapproval of Marie, the maid.

"I'm going to Albany to see my step-mother," Miss Cooper explained. "Mrs. Wylde gave me the money and said I could stay a week; real kind of her, wasn't it? But she isn't well, herself, she says, and has no work for me just now."

"Isn't well!" exclaimed Linda, alarmed, but the time had come for their train to start and they must not lose a moment in getting to their seats.

"Come with me in the drawing-room car," said Linda impetuously. "I must hear about Mrs. Wylde."

Miss Cooper, highly flattered, but concealing her emotions with what she conceived as quiet elegance, followed Linda, and they sat down in adjacent chairs. The maid found a seat on the sofa at the end of the car whence she watched them with inquisitive wonder. An English lady's maid is surprised at nothing, a French one at everything. It may be argued which attitude toward the world shows the greater omniscience.

"Now, do tell me about it!" said Linda, when the train had started. "Is she really ill? She seemed so well when I saw her four days ago!"

"No, she isn't really what you would call ill," replied Miss Cooper, adjusting herself primly in her chair and glancing about the car to see how many people were looking at them. The moment was a most enjoyable one to her.

"She doesn't seem like herself, somehow. They say she don't eat enough to keep a canary alive. I guess she works her brain too hard. That's awfully hard on women."

"Has she seen a doctor?'

"No. She won't have a doctor, and Mr. Humphrey just gives way to her."

Linda felt an impulse to say that apparently he did not often do this, but checked herself, not wishing to question, but Emma answered, as it were, her unspoken words.

"He's got more influence over her than any one else, Mr. Humphrey; he ought to make her have some medical advice."

"There's her old friend Dr. Macklevaine," said Linda, making a mental record of Miss Cooper's testimony in regard to Humphrey.

"Yes, but she'd never consult *him* of her own accord. She says the rôles of friend and physician can't

be doubled by even the best actor; you know that cute way she has of talking!"

"I do wish I could have seen her before I went away!" exclaimed Linda.

"She's been expecting you for some days," said Emma. There was a suggestion of reproach in her tone.

"It has been impossible for me to go," Linda replied with a kind of vehement regret, but the reproach Emma had implied could not be answered. She felt a desire to change the subject.

"What are you reading?" she asked, taking up the book in Miss Cooper's lap. It bore the ponderous title: "A Pluralistic Universe." Linda marvelled, but Miss Cooper showed a simple pride in her choice of literature. Living in an atmosphere of what she thought culture she felt it was becoming of her to be in the picture, as it were. She had become uneasily self-conscious about what she called her mind and was always taking her intellectual temperature by reading a few chapters in some reputedly profound book, to see if she understood it.

"I've only just begun this," she explained. "I don't have much time for reading, and when I get home tired at night, a novel is more restful, somehow."

"Are you still at the same boarding-house?" asked Linda.

"Oh, yes! I'm still at Mindelbaum's. Sometimes I think I'll make a change, because the people there are not as refined as I should like, but it's pretty clean, and the food's good, so I stay. I've got a real nice room too. It's small, but I hung all the walls with blue and pink figured silkoline, with curtains and bedcover of the same and it's quite dainty and pretty. Wherever I am I like to have things home-like. Old Mrs. Candy, who has the first floor front (her husband works with Lindeberg & Strumm, the firm I typewrite for sometimes) says she just loves to come to my room, it's so lady-like."

At times the annals of Mrs. Mindelbaum's boarding-house had for Linda a homely fascination, but to-day she began to wish that she had not insisted on Emma's company. She would have liked to be alone to brood over the interesting complications of her own life. There would be even a melancholy pleasure in contemplating what she felt was a difficult and romantic situation. But she did not wish to hurt her companion's feelings by suggesting any change, so let her talk on. She even asked an encouraging question, racking her brains to remember a name and an incident.

"How is that little manicure getting on. Flora—something—I can't think of her other name?"

"Flora Kelly?—oh! I feel real worried about her

sometimes. I guess if the other boarders treated her better she'd have more chance. But they keep whispering to each other about the 'downward path' and not passing the butter to her when she comes in to meals; it's enough to make any girl seek other company. She's looking very pretty just now, doing her hair a new way that makes it stay in behind the ears, and she's got one of those new tight skirts. When she wore it down to dinner the first time, Mrs. Candy nudged Lizzie Graham and said, 'By your fruits ye shall know them.' She pretended to speak low, but we could all hear. Of course it was kind of a misplaced quotation, but Mrs. Candy isn't in the least literary and there was nothing misplaced about her *meaning*. I saw Flora get red, and first she looked as if she were going to cry, and then she got angry and just put up her chin and wouldn't speak to anybody, not even to little old Mr. Moses, who's got asthma so badly, and is always nice and kind to everybody. What I think is it's no use to make little Kelly feel a sort of suspect in her own boarding-house. She hasn't got any home or family or any friends outside to do her any good. You don't know what a place like Levey's Manicuring Parlors is, Miss Arnold, nor do I, but I have kind of an idea. I made up my mind I'd have a good talk with Flora, and just show her she'd got one friend at Mindelbaum's, anyway. Well, I

went to her room that night. It's the hall bedroom on my floor and was all out of order with shoes and petticoats lying around. Flora was in her kimona, putting cold-cream on her face, but she wiped it off with a towel and seemed glad to see me. We talked for a while about that story of the Russian Grand Duke marrying Miss Sherman that was in the paper, and about the snowfall and how hard it was getting to work, mornings, with the trolleys all stuck. I couldn't help seeing a theatre programme lying on her wash-stand, one of the Hudson Theatre ones, and she had a two-dollar-and-a-half bunch of violets in a glass, pretty withered, but I saw by the kind of ribbon on them they were Thorley's violets, not just bought on the street.

"'Been going to the play?' I asked her casually.

"'Yes, a friend took me to see Mary Mannering last night,' she said, speaking as if she went to theatres like the Hudson every day of her life. I waited for her to tell me more, I knew she would.

"'Oh, Miss Cooper,' she said, just as I thought. 'I do wish you could meet my friend. He's one of the real Four Hundred!' I asked her how she met him herself and then the whole story came out. She went to a cinematograph show one afternoon, just to pass the time, as it was a half-holiday, and while she was there this man came in with a lady and a little

boy. I guess they had brought the little boy to see the flying-machines. I don't know. Anyway, the lady got faint or sick or something and had to be taken away, but the child wouldn't go because the flying-machines were just on and he must have been kind of a spoiled child, anyway. So they made him promise to be good, and sit still and the gentleman said he'd be back in fifteen minutes, and then he and the lady, it was his sister, hurried away. Well, directly they were gone, the flying-machines came to an end, and they put on a murder story, and the child got frightened. Flora felt sorry for him, and I guess she liked it because he was so well-dressed and stylish and all that—so she talked to him and kept him quiet, and then the man came back. That was the way they got acquainted. Old Mrs. Candy would say right away that Flora was nice to the little boy for her own reasons, but I am willing to give her the benefit of the doubt. She's a kind-hearted little thing, and always liked children, anyhow.

"She told me all this, very fully, but she didn't say much about what happened afterward, except that he had been very kind to her and treated her with as much respect as if she lived on Fifth Avenue.

"'You read a lot of novels, Flora,' I said to her, 'and you know the kind of adventures that begin like this?'

"'Yes, I know,' she said, in a rather independent way, 'and that's why it's all right; if you remember, the girls in the books never *did* know!'

"I told her she was alone in the world, and good-looking and hadn't got any too many friends at Mindelbaum's.

"'I've got *you*, anyway,' she said, and all of a sudden she threw her arms around my neck and kissed me.

"There's something about the little creature you can't help liking, though when I think of her slack ways and her foolishness, I've no patience with her. Well, there's where it is, Miss Arnold. This friend, as she calls him, takes her to the theatre every once in a while, and though the other boarders don't know anything about it now they are sure to find out and they'll think the worst things they can possibly think."

It was a very old and commonplace story that Emma told, but to Linda it was almost new. Poetry made it more romantic, novels gave it a more sombre tragedy, but here it was, surprisingly, a part of life itself, the life that went on all around her.

Flora Kelly's adventure and the possible fate hanging over her now absorbed Linda painfully and to the exclusion of everything else.

But Miss Cooper had suddenly become aware that the tale she had been telling was perhaps not of the

kind that are related to young girls like Linda. She was filled with humiliation. Had she perhaps been too outspoken, unrefined, she whose whole aim was to be lady-like as well as intellectual? It was a cruel and piercing question. What could she say now? How could she apologize if she had made a mistake? Her volubility had come to an end as abruptly as a flow of water is stopped by the closing of a spigot. In the most distressing embarrassment she turned her pocket-book over and over in her lap.

Linda, surprised at the long silence, looked at her companion curiously, and immediately divined what was troubling her. She was surprised. Did Emma think any girl of twenty, fairly well-read and intelligent, was in the present day ignorant of the very existence of wickedness! She smiled to herself at the idea, not knowing really what either knowledge or ignorance meant, unconscious of the fantastic nature of her own pretensions to understanding.

But she must not let Emma remain any longer in her visible state of perturbation.

"Poor little Flora Kelly!" she said. "One can't help feeling sorry for her! It makes me think of a story just like it my sister told me the other day—only I hope this will have a happier ending!"

Emma's face lightened. Then her offence had not been as great as she feared! It was so hard to tell

what people like Miss Arnold and her sister did or did not talk about!

In spite of her reassurance, however, she felt it just as well, for the moment, to choose another topic.

"Life doesn't have endings like books, often!" she said with an appropriate sigh. "By the way, how did you like the ending of Mrs. Wylde's last book, Miss Arnold?"

By this cunning transition, Emma felt she showed qualities of tact and ease which were lost in her present condition of life.

CHAPTER X

PENDING the final decision of Mr. Garborg as to the designs for his medical college, there was a cessation of activity in the office of Peters and Wylde, and much leisure for thought and conversation. Humphrey smoked numberless cigarettes and discussed with Norris by the hour the advisability of entering for the Greek Church competition. But they felt that their future hung, more or less, on the definite opinion of Mr. Garborg.

The medical college was the first real opportunity they had had to show what they could do. Already, poring over their blue-prints as a musician pores over a score, they saw it rising before them in its completed beauty of line and proportion. It was to be the beginning of their reputation and their fortunes. To Humphrey it promised, above everything else, the first step toward independence. His mother paid the household bills and gave him a liberal yearly allowance. That was as it should be, for she was, comparatively speaking, a rich woman and all his father's money had been left to her. But Humphrey longed for the freedom of knowing that he was sufficient to

himself. He was essentially an American and wished to stand or fall by his personal effort and achievement, not as a product of by-gone energies. The individual in him clamored for a justification of its existence.

He felt himself bound to the future, but through no obligations from the past, being a product of that robust individualism which makes the American conceive of force as a thing which must proceed from him and not to him. The people of the old-world monarchies think of their country as the child thinks of the father, the American thinks of the United States as the father does of the child.

Now in addition to Humphrey's instinctive impulse toward independence was the desire to stand well in Linda's eyes, to win some prize in the metropolitan tourney, so that she might be forced to fix her attention on him and applaud. He thought of her as the spectator before whom he must play his part among contenders, but she was also the goal and the award.

He had come away from his last agitated interview with her feeling that she was almost won. The very fierceness of her struggles to repulse him made him suspect that she felt the mastery of the power she denied. When he heard of her flight he smiled to himself, thinking it a betrayal of weakness, well contented that she should distrust her own self-command. He was willing to wait. Once or twice his

mother mentioned having had letters from her, and marvelled that she said nothing of her whereabouts, asking only that anything for her should be sent to the New York house from whence it would be forwarded.

"Seems to be in hiding," commented Humphrey, when this fact was revealed to him, and smiled to himself, as at some bit of humor which he alone could perceive. These days of inaction and uncertainty were not, as a whole, unpleasant ones.

His mother, as he put it, evasively even to himself, was "better." With the eternal buoyancy of human nature, the constantly reviving hope which alone makes living possible, he persuaded himself that her use of stimulants had perhaps been but a temporary thing, induced by nervous strain and ill health. As soon as she was physically stronger (and already he seemed to see a change in her, or fancied he did) she would no longer feel the temptation of alcohol. When he recalled the moment of despair in which it had seemed necessary to sacrifice all hopes of his own to the promise he had made his father it seemed incredible to him, as fantastic as a nightmare.

Garborg finally decided to build his college according to their plans, and when he communicated this to them by letter, Humphrey was assured that things were swinging into their right place at last, and that life would now become normal and consistent. He

was, himself, one of those perfectly sane beings to whom happiness seems the natural law of existence, other things being incidental, against the rules.

He and Peters decided they would give a supper to celebrate, not ostensibly, but only in their secret consciousness, the triumph over Garborg and the architecture of Christian IV.

"Where shall it be?" asked Humphrey.

"*The Comedians*," Peters replied, indicating a small Bohemian club of which they were both members.

"I'll pay my share," said Humphrey, "but you must give the supper. We don't want to give it as a *firm*, they might divine it was a sort of cackle over our success."

"All right," assented Peters, "I'll prove what I've always told you: that I'm a host in myself. Only, to square things up and give you a chance to make a reputation for hospitality, there ought to be a second supper, where I pay a share and you receive alone."

"Have to wait for another happy occasion," said Humphrey, allowing his mind to dwell for a moment on the possibility of one of those romantic announcements generally accompanied by festivity.

There were eight men at the supper. Forbes and Keasbey, two brother architects; Charles Notman, the artist; Thorne, a newspaper editor; Lewis and Hoyt, real estate brokers; Livingstone Winthrop,

club-man and patron of the drama; and, lastly, the Vicomte de Champéry, whom Humphrey invited because the Frenchman had brought letters of introduction to him, and it was obligatory that he should be entertained in one way or another. Naturally, they talked about America, it was de Champéry's first visit, especially New York.

"A city of mirthless waste," growled Joe Keasbey, who had lived ten years with Paris the courtesan, and foresworn legitimate ties forever. "Puritanism drunk and carousing!"

The Frenchman, who did not speak English fluently, stuck to the safe course of banal compliment, but Notman took the matter seriously, and gave a long tirade on the beauty of New York, the new beauty of massed towers, mountain-ranges of brick and mortar, shadow-filled canyon-like streets topped with a strip of blazing Spanish blue, aisle-like vistas of gray thoroughfares ending in a far-away glimmer of opal haze. But the newspaper man did not live for beauty, and turned the conversation on politics and an ex-President, who charged into the dinner as he had charged up a famous hill, and for three courses was attacked and defended with a vigor which proved him the representative of that law of worthy life which is the law of strife.

Afterward, when the smoke of this engagement had

cleared, the talk became more mellow and anecdotal. Humor obtained an ascendency over spirits softened by wine and good food, and the theme of woman was also introduced, coming slyly in at the end of the dinner like a dancer with a lifted skirt.

When Humphrey reached home that night he found his mother still sitting up, writing on a short story which she had promised to one of the magazines. When she saw him, she put it aside, remarking that she had done enough for that evening.

"Tell me about the dinner," she said.

Humphrey described the guests and repeated what he thought worthy to be repeated of the conversation.

"And what did De Champéry think of it all?" she asked. "How does he like American men?"

"Probably American men will never know," Humphrey replied, "unless he writes a book."

"And American women?"

"Can't you hear him on that subject—'sirens who have never been taught to sing and who wear their hair short,' was one thing he said to me confidentially to-night."

"The American woman has never learned *l'art de se faire aimer*," observed Dioneme; "all she wants is admiration and that she gets, even with her siren hair short, as your Frenchman puts it."

"He said that, generally speaking, he found Americans shy and self-distrustful. Their boasting he thought a naïf attempt to make themselves important and popular, as a child brags of its new mittens so that the other children will treat him with respect."

"We have certainly become wonderfully *tame*, almost timid," said Dioneme, "when one thinks whom we descended from—shouting old sea-vikings, stringy, Indian-fighting pilgrim fathers, Dutchmen who defended the Netherlands, and all the rest of them!"

"I think we could face oceans and wars and Indians all right," said Humphrey; "we're still settlers and fighters and barbarians at heart. It's this modern civilization that embarrasses us. We're like gypsies at court!"

"But we're individually so shrinking, no one ever does what some one else hasn't done. Now, for instance, imagine getting on a horse, late at night, and galloping down Fifth Avenue from One Hundred and Eleventh Street to Washington Square. Could anything be more glorious! But not a human being in New York, not even a mounted policeman, would dare to do it. No, it would be 'queer'——"

"And, incidentally, you'd be arrested," remarked Humphrey.

"And, another thing," went on Dioneme, "why don't we *use* our city, climb its towers, walk on its

bridges, explore its water-fronts? It's only like a great factory engine; we set it going in the morning, and it grinds out a living for us, and at night we stop it, and that's all."

"You forget Broadway!" observed Humphrey.

"Oh, Broadway—I suppose you mean what they call the 'White Way'— is only the noisy dinner of the factory hands."

Dioneme meditated for a moment, then sat up very straight, with a childish animation and eagerness in her eyes.

"Humphrey!" she exclaimed, "don't you think it would be delightful to walk across the Queensboro Bridge late, late at night—a winter night like this!"

"Get your hat!" said Humphrey briefly.

"Thank God for you, Humphrey!" breathed Dioneme as she went in search of her outer garments.

A few moments later they started in a taxi-cab, for even Dioneme's enthusiasm was unequal to walking the whole distance.

"How strange," she exclaimed, when they were on their way, "that once in every twenty-four hours we must go through this long black tunnel of night!" She leaned forward, looking eagerly out of the window as if she were seeing everything for the first time.

It was a warm night for winter, with a starless, opaque sky, and the asphalt pavement, wet from re-

cent rain, was tinted with long reflections from varying lights, violet, lemon color, orange and gold. To the west, over Broadway, the heavens glowed a dull, smooth rose as if a fire burned steadily beneath them. As they neared the bridge, they found the side street a yawning chasm surrounded by formless scaffolding on which clustered red lantern signals of danger.

"Chaos here!" said Dioneme, as they turned back, "but that's New York—always in the agony of dissolution, or new birth."

Finally they were able to leave their taxi-cab, and mount to the promenade of the bridge.

"What silence!" she cried. "We are quite alone. I don't even hear the sound of horses' feet on the drive, or of a tram, or an automobile." They walked briskly along the high-swung way, looking out over the immensity of earth and sky and water, and as they went on Dioneme talked intermittently in short broken sentences, abstracted, as if she were murmuring in her sleep.

"The bridge is more over land than water, yet there seems to be water everywhere. I feel as if I were looking down deep into some city at the bottom of a sea. How damp and salt the air is, yet not pure, somehow; it has a faint flavor of human squalor in it, of slime and mouldy river-banks. It feels thick against my face.—Now we are over the water and it is fresher.

See the East River, how thin it looks; a Venetian canal on each side of Blackwells Island! And that long, quivering line of blue light—what is that?—I saw a phosphorescent marine creature like it once in an aquarium.—This is no sleeping world, it crouches, watching, like an animal in the dark.—How long the walk is! It seems to lead to infinity. There are no stars, Humphrey, but what glorious beauty. We are suspended over the heads of all men like a divine thought spanning chasms. All the power of the bridge seems to be in us, don't you feel it!—we are iron, triumphant, invincible!

"Now, I'm not going to talk any more" she said finally, "just walk on silently. I shall feel it more."

"Good," agreed Humphrey. He was mentally engaged in considering statistics he had read in regard to this bridge. After some time he remembered to ask his mother if she were not tired, if she were enjoying herself, if it was what she had wanted.

"It is perfect," she said almost in a whisper, "wonderful! It makes me forget who I am and what life is. Now I am just part of the bridge—between land and sky, with cities in each hand."

Three days after their night walk, Humphrey started for Michigan.

"Take good care of her, Parker," he said to the maid when he bade his mother good-by. His mind

was almost at ease about her, and on the journey he permitted himself to think entirely of his work and of Linda. He had, indeed, a boyish vision of taking her himself, on some future day, to see the medical college in all its completed architectural beauty. In his mind he pictured her sitting in the empty place beside him. Indeed, if airy imagination could take form, many commonplace and seemingly stolid young men might be seen, on their travels, in similar radiant company. Humphrey still knew nothing of Linda's place of retreat, but it was a consolation to know that his rival was no better informed than he. Jackson had inadvertently betrayed as much when the two men met one day at the club. He still felt that he could afford to wait; sooner or later Linda would come back to him, and of her own free will. Since that last talk with her, on the day after the concert, he had had no real doubts.

Humphrey was absent from home for a week, and returned on a bleak day in March when the rain was slanting fiercely over the city, freezing as it fell. The house, too, as he entered it struck him as being singularly cheerless. No fire burned on the drawing-room hearth, though it was five o'clock in the afternoon, and the flower-vases were unfilled. An overlooked dust-cloth trailed forlornly along a chair. The house-maid snatched it up, and hastily concealed it about her person.

"Isn't Mrs. Wylde at home? Doesn't she expect me?" asked Humphrey puzzled.

"Oh, yes, sir, Mrs. Wylde had the telegram this morning, but she's not been quite well, Parker says. She hasn't been downstairs since yesterday morning. I think she's asleep now, sir."

Humphrey, filled with anxiety, dashed upstairs to his mother's room. Parker was nowhere to be seen. He opened the bedroom door and saw that Dioneme was lying on the couch by the fire. Near her, on a table, a single shaded light was burning. She seemed asleep, but Humphrey saw that it was more stupor than natural slumber. He bent over to examine her face; it looked swollen and unnatural, with loose, partly open lips. Her beautiful hair hung tangled about her ears. She was breathing heavily, almost snoring. Never had Humphrey seen her as she was now, for this was complete downfall and overthrow. It was a noisome caricature of Dioneme which lay there, unconscious, incapable of either thought or speech. It was as if some gross and unclean spirit had entered her body and driven out its rightful owner.

For a moment Humphrey's hopes, his courage, even, failed him. Then the pity of it mastered everything else. His mother—in the grip of such a horror! He felt as he might have done if he had known her secretly married to a satyr. She must be freed at no matter what cost!

He touched the hand which hung down inertly at her side, the veins swollen with blood. It was a thin, nervous hand with delicately smooth and pointed fingers, the hand of an artist, a dreamer, one who could not fight the world alone. He remembered his father's words: "She was born on a midsummer night in an island of the sea, and christened from a book of Herrick's songs," and a choking sensation made itself felt in his throat. He went out of the room quietly, closing the door after him. Then he sent for Parker to come to him in his mother's sitting-room. While he waited for her he strode up and down restlessly, planning what he would say and do. Clearly, his mother must no longer be left to herself: she must be continually guarded and watched. She must be considered now as an invalid too weak and inconsequent to know what treatment she needed.

And this Humphrey could not do alone, even if he gave all his time to it. He must have a helper, an ally, some one whom he could trust and bind to his service. Would Parker be sufficient? He asked himself doubtfully, waiting for their approaching interview before passing judgment.

The woman came in at last with her usual quiet and respectful air, and waited for him to speak.

"I have just seen Mrs. Wylde," said Humphrey, "but I did not wake her up."

"No, sir?" replied Parker with a carefully non-

committal accent. Humphrey found his position more difficult even than he had feared. But it was useless to pretend to any artifices of phrase.

"Her condition was a great shock and a great surprise to me," he went on.

The maid made no reply, and a sudden flare of annoyance blazed up in Humphrey. There was something profoundly irritating about this smooth and self-sufficient silence. It seemed more insolent than respectful in its all-knowing reticence. He wished that he could suddenly shatter Parker's mask of well-trained servitude, and behold a human countenance, responsive to his own. Then a moment's reflection showed him he was unjust. The woman was in a trying situation, where discretion was all that was possible to her.

"I think we agreed once before, Parker, that stimulants were dangerous for my mother," he said finally. "Now the time has come when it is a matter of great importance that she should not be able to get them."

"Yes, sir," agreed Parker. Her clear but insignificant hazel eyes met Humphrey's for the first time in a glance which seemed to promise co-operation. He noticed that the light in which she was standing brought the wen on her forehead into unusual prominence.

"She must have been very unlike herself during the last few days, very careless of consequences?" said Humphrey, sick at heart for seeming to question.

"It was Ellen," remarked the maid. "Mrs. Wylde asked her for the champagne and she brought it. I tried to argue with Mrs. Wylde, but it was no use, she was like an ill person, some one in a fever."

"It *is* an illness," said Humphrey.

"Yes, I know, sir."

Humphrey reflected for a moment. "Does Ellen have charge of the keys of the wine-cellar?" he asked finally.

"Yes, sir, but there's very little wine kept in the house, you know, on account of there being so little room."

Humphrey said that thereafter he should keep the keys himself, and that when Ellen needed wine for the table she must come to him.

"You are fond of my mother, I think, Parker?" he asked.

"Yes, I always tell every one she is a very nice lady," replied the maid. Her accent of conscientious recommendation would have amused Humphrey at another time.

"She's been kind to you?"

"Very, sir."

"You have a chance now, Parker, to be of the greatest help to Mrs. Wylde and to me. You know what her condition is. She is growing gradually worse, and will never be well again until she gives up alcoholic stimulants. She is too weak, just now, to do this of her own will. I know she wishes it. She must be helped by keeping all these things absolutely away from her. Can you do it?"

Parker remarked in a level, unemotional voice that it was a hard task, but Humphrey thought he saw a look of sympathy glimmer for a moment on her face.

"I know it is hard," he said, "but I shall be here as much as possible to help you. Between us we must cure her!" His faith and enthusiasm should have been contagious, but Parker only sighed.

"I'm sure I hope so, sir," she said. "'Tis a terrible thing! I never thought I should have a thing like it come on me, and such a nice lady too!"

Humphrey considered another aspect of the situation. Perhaps it had already been in the maid's mind.

"Of course I realize I am asking for much more than your usual services, and you shall be paid accordingly," he remarked.

Parker replied deferentially that she knew Mr. Humphrey would do what was right.

"I shall give you double your present wages," he said, after some consideration. "Of course, Mrs. Wylde will not know of this."

"Of course not, sir. Thank you, sir."

"It will be as if I had engaged a nurse, in addition to a maid. Invalids are often obliged to have the attendance of a nurse against their will."

Parker did not apparently grasp the necessity of this presentation of the facts—a presentation by which Humphrey strove to silence inward protest—but acquiesced in it. There was a moment's silence.

"Is that all, sir?" asked the maid, at last.

It seemed to Humphrey that there was a great deal more, but he could not have explained what it was. He had anticipated something vaguely different from his talk with Parker, yet he felt that there was nothing of which he could precisely complain. The woman had been respectful, understanding, willing to do her best to help him. Perhaps in his own disappointment and trouble he would have liked a warmer expression of sympathy, even if it had been less full of respect. A little human friendliness, something less chilly than the carefully repressed condolence of an inferior. If she could have forgotten for a moment that she was an inferior it would have been grateful to him. If she could have been just a kind, middle-aged woman, not a lady's maid! He said to himself, though, that he

had expected the impossible. Parker was faithful and devoted to his mother. She had been with them for five years, through all the trial of his father's illness and death, she would not fail them now, in any of the things which were essential.

CHAPTER XI

"BUT you're mad!" exclaimed Norris Peters, "you're raving! I never heard such nonsense in my life!"

"Nonsense or not—it's got to be," said Humphrey firmly.

The two men had been lunching together at Delmonico's, and were lingering over their coffee and cigarettes.

"Give up the work in Michigan—give up the office! —why, it's your *life*, man, you're giving up!"

"Life's a long affair," said Humphrey. His face wore a somewhat stolid expression. He stared with the fixedness of the unperceiving gaze at an old man sitting at a table near them.

Peters was silent for a moment, unable to find words to express his annoyance and disapproval. Finally he burst forth again:

"So you've lost your ambition and got too lazy to work! That's the way it looks, at all events!— I'm joking of course—don't mind it!—What's at the bottom of it all, Humphrey? You're not going to make a mystery of it to me—are you?"

"Certainly not—the facts are what I've told you. My mother is not well—I want to be more with her. We may travel. As you know, it isn't really necessary for me to make money. Why shouldn't I do as I like?"

"Keep your reasons to yourself if you like—" said Peters, "but don't talk like that, at least to me. I'm not a fool. What does your mother say to all this?"

Humphrey hesitated—finesse was not strongly in his character. In diplomacy he would, in all probability, have followed the school of Benjamin Franklin.

"She doesn't know what my plan is as yet," he said finally. "She'll approve when she knows it. Keasbey's been anxious to come in with us for some time," he added. "Now's your chance to get him."

"Damn Keasbey," observed Peters.

"Don't think I'm not sorry to leave you, old Norry," Humphrey said.

They smoked in silence for a short time, watched by an indifferent waiter, who was hanging about, with dog-like patience, waiting for his tip. He observed to himself that the young gentlemen did not seem very friendly, not divining that it was against the demands of friendship they were both struggling.

"Well," said Peters, at length, "it's quarter to three—no use to talk this over any more, I suppose?"

"No use," said Humphrey, "there'll be a lot of arrangements to make, but that will all come along in time."

"We'd better be off, then." Peters put a half-dollar into the discreetly extended palm and went with Humphrey into the hall where they struggled into their coats. "Going back to the office?" asked Humphrey.

"No—I've got to see a man about that electrical contract—and one or two other things besides."

Peters watched Humphrey disappear through the swinging doors, and then went to the telephone booth, where he looked up a name and address.

"Hello—give me 1195—is that 1195? Dr. Macklevaine?—Ask him if he can see Norris Peters some time this afternoon. Yes—Hello?—At once, you say?—Yes, in five minutes. I'll be there."

Peters came out of the booth with the calm expression of one who has decided on a proper course of action and taken the first step. A taxi-cab rushed him to the office of Dr. Macklevaine, and he found that robust gentleman alone in a working cabinet which was decorated with scientific instruments and charts, and smelt of iodoform.

"What can I do for you?" asked the doctor, in his professional manner. From the young man's expression he thought he foresaw some emergency operation.

"It's not for me—it's Humphrey Wylde," said Peters.

"Is Humphrey ill?"

"No—not in body," replied Peters impatiently. He longed to get to the vital thing he had to speak of at once, without beating about the bush.

"Look here, doctor," he said, "you and I don't know each other very well, but we're both friends of the Wyldes."

At this preamble a guarded expression crept into the doctor's eyes, his professional geniality of encouragement vanished; it was as if he had hastily put on a disguise of dark glasses.

But Peters, if he noticed, was not disconcerted.

"Now as far as the world goes the Wyldes' secrets are my secrets," he continued, "just as they are yours —but friends, such as we are, are not blind."

"I don't understand you—" said the doctor, seeming to bristle, like the old dog he was.

"I'll speak more plainly, then. Humphrey is about to give up his work as an architect—his whole career and future in fact—so as to be constantly with his mother, and protect her from the suspicions of the world. I don't deny that it's a fine quixotic thing to do, but, all the same, Humphrey mustn't be sacrificed."

"Sacrificed to what?" inquired the doctor. There

was a gathering and portentous wrath hovering about him which should have been a warning, but the younger man went incautiously on.

"To the vice of a woman whose life is more than half over, while his is just beginning," he said boldly.

The doctor rose from his seat, and turned on his visitor like a great bull teased into combat. "Young man," he said, "my house is not a place where a lady can be lightly spoken of." His face was congested with anger.

In the soul of each individual there is one spot that is holy but vulnerable. It will be defended to the uttermost, and woe to the assailant. Whether deliberate or accidental, his will be a hazardous invasion.

Peters saw that he had touched this spot in Dr. Macklevaine and instinctively drew back.

"—I—it was not my intention—" he stammered. A little reflection gave him back his courage. "I insult no one, sir—not even in my thoughts. There are failings which are infirmities; one thinks of them only with pity. But can't these failings be guarded —cured perhaps—without destroying a life like Humphrey's?"

Old Macklevaine controlled himself with a giant effort, and brought himself to speak with calm civility to this venturesome intruder.

"Even presuming that there was a situation which called for self-sacrifice," he said, "it is not a virtue which destroys a life—rather, it builds up."

"Character—yes—but what of Humphrey's career?"

"It will be Mrs. Wylde who will have made the name of her son and his father remembered." The doctor's lips twisted painfully as he spoke of Dioneme —but there was a finality in what he said. Peters felt that against this sore and stubborn passion there was no attack possible. Dr. Macklevaine would look approvingly on Humphrey's ruin if by it his mother could be saved or even helped. It was a new disclosure to Peters. He had always put down the doctor's devotion to Dioneme as merely the chivalrous sentiment which is the child and sometimes life-long survivor of youthful ardor. Now the enthusiasm with which he had come to the house, the arguments by which he hoped to find aid in preventing Humphrey from throwing away his future, slipped from him. He tried to repeat with more effect what he had already said about misguided self-sacrifice, and ventured to suggest that each individual had a right to his own freedom, to his own self-expression, but, before Dr. Macklevaine's scornful silence, his words sounded feeble and unconvincing.

Finally he rose to go.

"You believe that I came as a friend not only of

Humphrey's, but of his mother's?" he said, as he stood at the door.

"Your motives were, I am sure, most praiseworthy," replied the doctor. But Peters felt when he went down the steps that, if his late host had followed his desires, he would have given him an impetus to departure as vulgar as it was vehement.

It was without any further resistance on the part of his friend that Humphrey finally retired from business—temporarily, he put it to himself, though with a doubt in his mind. He had fancied that an explanation with his mother would be difficult, but Dioneme, when he spoke to her, was abstracted, musing on other things, and said that he must do what he thought best. Probably it would be better for him to be by himself, when he returned to work later, than to be one of a firm. She took it for granted that Humphrey wanted to travel, to study the art of other civilizations, but begged him, a little wistfully, not to leave her just yet. And so things drifted.

He often wondered how much she concealed from him of her own knowledge of her condition. It was a question they never spoke of openly. If she struggled against her weakness, she gave no sign; if she fell—and this fear was always uppermost in Humphrey's mind, she contrived to conceal it. She made no comment to him on the changes he had effected in

the ordering of the household; overlooked, if she even suspected it, his secret understanding with Parker. Once the maid had informed Humphrey of certain confiscations she had made, parcels which had been brought into the house stealthily—but though he perceived the necessity of knowing these things he always shrank distastefully from any of the lady's-maid's communications. She, perhaps, felt this repugnance and, taking it personally, secretly resented it.

It was while Humphrey was making his final arrangements for dissolving the partnership with Peters that Linda returned to town. She had been away six weeks. It was now early spring, but still cold, with occasional flurries of snow, as the winter that year lingered long. During her absence Dioneme's book had appeared, and, by its perusal, her infatuation for the author had been fed and maintained. Constant personal association with Dioneme had dimmed, in a degree, the sense of her genius; the novel again proclaimed it. Linda thought that in her renewed absorption by the mother her temporary madness in regard to the son had been completely cured. She looked forward with perfect calmness to her next meeting with Humphrey. They would be friends, she told herself, with the eternal confidence of young women in that eloquent phrase. She informed Dioneme of her return in a brief note, and asked when she could

see her. The only reply she had was a message from Emma Cooper, over the telephone, saying that Mrs. Wylde was not well, but hoped to be able to receive Miss Arnold in a very few days. At least Humphrey would come to see her immediately, Linda thought. He was, of course, still the eager lover, even if he had been angry for a while at her flight and her silence. His mother would have let him know of her return. She looked forward to telling him calmly what their future relations were to be—it would be a pleasure to let him see how much she really liked and esteemed him, now that she no longer feared, on her own part, either his supplications or any of those tumultuous silences which had so confounded her in the past.

But Humphrey did not come, and she was forced into the reluctant belief that he had been angrier at her running away from him than she had thought possible. Altogether there was much that was unsatisfactory about her home-coming. She had so looked forward to taking the threads of events in her own hands, had felt herself so strong and competent! Now things were in a mysterious tangle—and there was no one to unravel them. If she could only see Dioneme! But still no summons came, and her pride would not permit her to write a second time asking for an interview. She had to be contented with frequent

inquiries sent through servants over the telephone—to which the answer was always that Mrs. Wylde was a little better—nothing more.

When Walter Jackson was shown in one afternoon at tea time soon after her return, she received him with pleasure, not only for his own sake, but because she thought he might bring her news of the Wyldes.

Though she did not know it, this was the express purpose of Walter's visit. At first, however, this matter of prime importance to both of them was diplomatically held in reserve.

"No need to ask how you are," said Jackson, as he took the cup of tea she had prepared for him, "you show you've had six weeks of open air and early hours."

"The country was delicious," replied Linda. "I skated when the roads were too hard to ride."

"Any people staying in the house?" asked the young man, on the lookout for rivals.

"No—my little cousin had the whooping-cough, so they couldn't have visitors. I wasn't sorry. I like being alone."

This Jackson put down as a girlish vagary which time would overcome. No well-balanced human being liked being alone—especially in the country.

"What has been going on in New York?" asked Linda.

"Nothing much—no end of people have gone South.

There was the Hollister's Ball, but it was dull—not enough men—and the O'Gradys had the Swedish dancers—paid a fortune for one night—every one went out of curiosity, even old Miss Anne Sturdevant who always swore she wouldn't set foot inside the O'Grady's house."

Jackson talked on easily, giving her the record of the little surface happenings which had broken the monotony of their circle. A student of life would have read profounder meanings into these events, but in Walter Jackson thought had few reflexes. This was one of the reasons why he filled so competently and aggreeably the place in society where chance and his own exertions had located him.

Linda was not unheedful of the mild gossip—it is against nature not to listen when we hear what our friends and acquaintances have been doing—but the dissatisfaction of which she had been aware ever since her return increased. In her mind she pronounced an arraignment against the nothingness of New York society. Would Walter tell her anything about the Wyldes without being asked, or must she, in desperation, venture a question? This last was spared her, as Jackson was even more anxious than she to concern himself with Humphrey and his mother.

"What do you think of young Wylde's last move?" he asked abruptly. He had hoped to take her by sur-

prise and when he saw her expression change felt that he had done so. She knew nothing he felt sure.

"You forget I've been away," said Linda.

"Oh, I thought you might have heard by letter!—Well—he's given up his profession, retired from work altogether. It's what the men who knew him in Paris always predicted—*I* never believed it—took me quite off my feet when I heard it."

Linda's apparent lack of interest was unnatural, and even Jackson was only partially deceived by it.

"Strange you hadn't heard!" he remarked, eyeing her closely.

"Of course there's some reason for it," she said; "what does he say?"

"I haven't seen him, myself—but I hear he doesn't say *anything*. After all—if it comes to that, why need a man work if there's no need for it? Mrs. Wylde makes money enough for two and there's the father's fortune beside. He wasn't rich, old Wylde, but he was no pauper!"

Linda tried to force herself into a realization of how contemptible Humphrey had shown himself to be, how he had justified her undefined suspicions of him, but succeeded only in feeling that she had never liked Walter Jackson so little.

"Perhaps he wants to take care of his mother, to be with her more," she suggested, leaping at a half

truth with feminine divination. "You know, she is not well."

"Men don't give up their professions to take care of women," replied Jackson, with undeniable reason—"but it shows how kind-hearted you are to try and find an excuse for him. Other people aren't so charitable. Every one's down on him—too much down on him, from my point of view. But they'll forget it in a week—what does it matter?"

Linda's mind was in a distressing confusion. She was vexed with Walter that he had repeated such a tale about Humphrey; vexed that he should try to defend him with such an unrighteous argument as that there was no need of a man's working if he could be supported otherwise. She longed to be able to cast out Humphrey utterly, and at the same time every instinct in her rushed to his defence against those who would themselves cast him out.

Now it seemed to her imperative that she should see him—and at once. But he would not come and she dared not write to him. They had parted almost as lovers. She had fled from herself as much as from him. A summons from her now would mean only one thing to him; that was, no doubt, one reason why he was waiting. He left the decision to her. Probably he had taken her flight as a mere bit of girl's caprice, and, if he was angry, was also smiling in his sleeve.

"It's not by any means the last of Humphrey. He's a hard man to down," said Jackson aloud, in startling parallel with her thoughts.

Linda wrenched herself out of abstraction.

"No—I dare say not," she said. "Will you have a little more tea?"

Jackson had come to the house that afternoon with some idea of advancing his own suit by other than indirect methods, but he finally decided that it was not yet the time He drank his second cup of tea, which, being prepared without attention or interest on the part of the maker, was strong, bitter, and nearly cold. Then he took his departure.

Linda sat idly by the tea-table for some time afterward. Life she felt was not only difficult but distasteful. Her Irish terrier climbed up and laid his head against her arm. On his ugly bearded face was a look of age, wisdom, and intense devotion. But for once this appeal left Linda indifferent.

"Go and lie down, Paddy," she said coldly. So another honest heart felt the ache of a puzzled love!

CHAPTER XII

IT was a windy day in early spring; stiff breezes came in gusts and swept the dust and dried manure of the streets into little whirling eddies; odd scraps of paper skimmed along the sidewalks and the women's skirts flapped behind them as they walked tilted to meet the rushing air.

Linda came out of the house with her dog and turned into the park. There was beauty and the promise of early spring. Surrounded by the grim, compressing city this bit of nature was like some fresh, exquisite body squeezed in a corset.

Linda walked briskly, the dog ahead of her tugging on his leash. On the benches tramps, nurse-maids with their charges, and robust matrons from Second Avenue sunned themselves and read the morning *American*. A group of children on roller-skates streamed by her with a noise like a cataract. She turned into a narrower path which led across a meadow. There it was quiet—almost like the country. An old German was feeding two gray squirrels, who sat demurely on their haunches, cracking peanuts with their sharp little teeth, their furry tails stiffly upheld like battle standards at

rest. Paddy strained at his leash, but they looked at him indifferently with their bright, roving eyes, knowing no evil, protected by the laws of the city.

"New York's one sentimentality," thought Linda. She moved aside to let a wobbly baby, strayed too far from its nurse, pass her in safety. Somehow the atmosphere of the park was less peaceful and soothing than she had hoped. It was just then that she perceived Humphrey. He was coming toward her from the west side of the park. She imagined that there was an air of unhappy leisure about him, that he was there, most perceptibly, because he had nothing else to do. This conviction hardened her heart, which had stirred a little at sight of him.

He must have noticed her from a long distance, for he showed no surprise as he came up to her. Any other emotion he may have felt was carefully concealed. He took off his hat and the sun glistened on his sleek, black hair. His blue, sailor's eyes met Linda's without a shadow of self-consciousness. Again that sickening conviction that it was he who commanded the situation, that helplessness she always felt when she was with him, swept over her. But he must explain himself—must prove that he was not unworthy! This done—she was, she all at once discovered, ready to cast all her magnificent resolutions to the wind, to deny her own calm and the cure wrought by absence,

to yield entirely to the emotion that shook her at the renewed sight of him. But on the necessity of explanation she held firm. "Where there is no respect there can be no love," was still her shibboleth, though every slender thread of her being denied it.

"So you are back in town!" said Humphrey.

"Didn't you know?"

"I suspected."

"And you didn't come to see me!" said Linda with uneasy and ineffectual coquetry.

Humphrey made no direct answer.

"Shall we sit down?" he asked, indicating a bench somewhat removed from the vicinity of the old German. Linda assented, and tied her dog to the iron arm of the bench. They sat in silence for a moment. The softness of the spring around them seemed to woo them to gentleness and peace, but Linda stood fast in her inward determination to love only where she could respect.

"How does it happen that you are walking in the park at eleven o'clock in the morning?" she asked uncompromisingly.

Humphrey was studying her soft, flushed cheeks, the slant of her eyebrows, and the curve of her young mouth. How often he had seen that little face before him in the dark of sleepless nights! But it was more beautiful even than he remembered it—more dear!

"I asked you why you were in the park at eleven o'clock," repeated Linda. She met his eyes for an instant, grew tremulous, and looked away.

"Why do you ask?"

"You used to be at work."

"I have given up my office," said Humphrey shortly.

Linda waited for an explanation, but none came. His ignoring of his own offence made her angry. Was it possible he thought, as Walter had suggested, that there was no necessity for a man to work if he had other means of support? Did he really intend to live in idleness on the bounty of his mother?

"But you mean to work at *something*, don't you?" she asked insistently. Around them some sparrows twittered gayly as if of the futility of hair-splitting morality and ethical argument. The warm air, full of the pleasant scent of brown mould and of the first grass blades which were beginning to tint the wintry turf with green, blew in their faces. Love! love!—breathed the delicious breath of coming spring.

"What does it matter what I mean to do?" said Humphrey, leaning toward her. "Can't you trust me?"

"Oh—I *want* to trust you!" exclaimed Linda; "it is what I want most of all." Now that she had made this admission she perceived its truth.

"There is only one thing that matters—everything else is a part of that." What this was Humphrey made known to her wordlessly. Unrebuked he laid his hand on hers.

"Are you going to marry me some day, Linda?" he said suddenly. The girl turned away from him though she left her hand where it was.

"Oh—I can't believe in you! I can't believe in you!" she moaned.

"Won't you trust your heart?"

"I must be sure the man I love is absolutely all I want him to be—before I think of—before I—" she faltered at the word "marry." It was unpronounceable. "Oh—can't you tell me why you give up your work!"

"Some day you will know everything about me. Don't be afraid of that day, dear," said Humphrey.

"But I want to know *now!*" Linda cried. He felt a flash of something like anger at this childish obstinacy, this insistence on the mere ethics of their relationship, but it vanished in an instant. Linda was so ignorant of life and of her own heart!

"Where there is no respect there can be no love," she repeated now. It was the first time she had pronounced this watchword aloud and it gave her new courage.

Humphrey sighed. She had drawn her hand away

from him, but she looked him directly in the eyes this time, with something so innocent, so appealing in her gaze that his heart stirred with a kind of pity. How could he teach her that love was enough—or would it change her too much if she knew?

"I can't argue with you, Linda," he said. "How can we sit here together and argue like two professors! Do you love me or not?"

"You talk as if love were everything!" said Linda. endowed, of a sudden, with the dignity of a real conviction, her very platitudes breathing eloquence, her eyes flashing. "It may be the most powerful—but it's not *everything*. There is much more that we have to consider in life—whether we want to or not—honor, our duty to other people—things like that.

"It may be, as you seem to think, that love can sweep everything else aside, and be its own justification, but the other things will not let themselves be forgotten."

A change came over Humphrey's face as she talked, it grew graver, his expression showed that her words h d started him on some track of thought in which she had little or no part.

When she had finished it half alarmed her to see how much her arguments had apparently moved him, how carefully he could suppress in a moment all signs of his late tenderness. His manner had now only what seemed a studied consideration. While she had been

doubting, hesitating about drawing nearer to him, he, it seemed, had removed himself irrevocably from her. It was another mystery. She waited for him to speak, trembling a little.

"There is a great deal that I can't explain to you," he said finally. He had risen now and was standing in front of her, looking down into her face. "A great deal you will never understand perhaps. When I saw you again to-day I thought that you loved me, and I believed—still believe—that love is enough!

"If it is the real thing it is inspired—even though unconsciously often by what you call 'respect'—not at war with it. I felt that this love between us could make everything else that seemed difficult quite plain and easy. I wouldn't have hesitated to have taken you to share even trouble, responsibility with me, if I had been sure of your love.

"But now, all of a sudden, you have made me see things differently. You don't believe in me, you can't love me without believing in me, you say. I doubt if you could ever love me at all!—And, unconsciously, you've pointed out other things. I don't need to speak of them. They have nothing to do with you. Perhaps I was wrong in thinking of marriage at all—or rather perhaps I didn't think of it enough.

"It is clear to me now, at any rate, that I must give up such thoughts."

Then his voice changed, and Linda divined in him a last uncontrollable flaring up of hope.

"There is nothing else you want to say to me?" he asked finally.

Something in Linda's soul at that moment mourned for him with tears and cries. If he had given her any hint that he was in trouble, that his life was difficult, that he needed her help, her petty doubts of herself and of him might have vanished; for, in spite of her twenty years, her inexperience and the narrow environment in which she had always lived, Linda was one of that divine class of women whose nature it is to give. But Humphrey showed no sign of needing any one's pity—rather he seemed more than usually master of himself and assured.

"No—there is nothing more," she said, in response to his question. She would have liked to have added something, even now, about their being friends, but it was impossible for her to articulate these conventionalities.

"Good-by, then!" said Humphrey.

"Good-by," she replied, and he was gone.

Linda sat quite still on the bench, numb and bewildered, trying to think how it had all happened—and so quickly!

The old German was still feeding the squirrels at a little distance, her terrier lay rolled up in a shaggy

red ball at her feet—but Humphrey had gone. Out of her life?

She supplied a violent negation to this query from her inmost necessities. No, they must still be friends! She felt, unconscious of her own absurdities, that she could trust him enough, at least, for that relationship.

Meanwhile Humphrey had swung himself into a Fifth Avenue motor bus and was being borne, heavily and noisily, a solitary passenger, toward his home. The strain of the past half hour had been so great that he threw it off not simply by a mental effort but through the inevitable reaction of nature itself. It was not impossible to occupy himself with trivialities as a man may who issues from the consulting-room of a dispensary where he has heard himself doomed, but at the same time the unacknowledged pain persisted—a reminder that all was not well with him.

He lit a cigarette and the smoke from it floated, unlawfully, through the open windows of the omnibus. In the park he noticed the willow-trees were changing from the golden brown of lacquer to a delicate green. Workmen were busy with the new wing of the Metropolitan Museum. He wondered idly when it would be finished.

A camel, led by an Arab in native dress, padded its exotic way along the asphalt, advertising on its saddle-cloth a newly opened café. With wide, melancholy

eyes, accustomed once to the limitless sands of Sahara, it gazed ahead at the Plaza Hotel, looming up like an inconceivably vast white porcelain German stove.

At Fifty-ninth Street a little milliner's apprentice carrying a brightly flowered paper hat-box got into the bus. Humphrey threw his cigarette out of the window, and the girl looked at him shyly, adjusting the cheap gilt side-combs she wore in her yellow hair. She was a pretty girl, about sixteen, with short skirts which showed her clumsy patched boots.

The omnibus swung into the congestion of lower Fifth Avenue and their progress was slower. Commerce and fashion joined here to form a turbulent procession in which their separate guilds, rivals, or allies, were all audaciously represented.

Here was life, clangorous, ever-changing yet inextinguishable—Humphrey, beholding, drew from it in some strange way the serenity which many men find by gazing at the stars. His own trouble was lost temporarily in this vast tumult. It cured like the inoculation of serum extracted from the body of a creature which has suffered from the disease similar to one's own.

When he reached home he found Dr. Macklevaine, who had come to lunch. Dioneme was entertaining him by the window in the drawing-room. She had been ill with a severe cold and had come downstairs to

lunch for the first time in a week. "I'm much better —in all kinds of ways—and it's mostly due to Humphrey," she said to the doctor, when the former came in. "You know, he stays at home with me now. All I needed was some one to take care of me!"

"He's done quite right!" said the doctor gruffly; and each of the three wondered how much the others divined of what was really meant. They were like people in three separate small boats who join hands for a moment under the smiling pretence of being at one. Of them all Dioneme was the most truly insouciant. Humphrey, as he looked at her, was amazed, as always, at her unfeigned forgetfulness of realities, her absorption in the non-existent.

"How is the book coming on?" asked Dr. Macklevaine, intent on pleasing.

"Very well, I believe," replied Dioneme indifferently. "It doesn't interest me, now that it is published, any more than the menu of a dinner I've already eaten."

"Thinking of a new one, are you?"

"Yes—I want to write a story about a miner—but I know nothing about mines! I shall have to read a great many books, which will be hard work. The trouble with me is I have mind, but no memory."

"You have the essential," said the doctor ponderously.

"Perhaps—but memory is the valet of mind; it goes behind and carries the paraphernalia with which mind bedecks itself in order to make a brilliant appearance in the world." Humphrey took no part in the ensuing discussion. It did not seem to him at that moment of any special significance. If his mother could ignore realities, he, at any rate, must gather them up and see that they were given their proper place.

After luncheon, when Dioneme had left them for a few moments, Dr. Macklevaine spoke to Humphrey in a tone which showed that he, too, dealt conscientiously as well as by instinct with realities.

"Your mother's looks don't please me," he said, "and her cough lasts too long—I should like to have Giles see her."

"*Giles?*"

Humphrey looked up sharply. This selection of a specialist alarmed him. Dr. Macklevaine met him with a steady look in the eyes. Their intelligences communicated wordlessly. Finally Humphrey said aloud, groping, as he was, among uncertainties:

"You've known my mother for a long time—but there is a great deal—perhaps——"

The doctor interrupted him, fingering attentively a small spoon which lay before him, in order not to again meet Humphrey's gaze. "There is nothing you can tell me about your mother which I do not know," he

said. "I know her life, her temptations, her—" he hesitated a little—"her failings. It is because of this knowledge that I am anxious about her now. She is not in a condition to resist disease."

The import of the doctor's words seemed to partially evade Humphrey, though the sense of misfortune which had been upon him grew heavier. There was a moment of instinctive and personal revolt. It was more than he could bear.

"Poor mother!" he said—then—"this is not the first knock I've had to-day." In his very attempt at courage there may have been an unconscious wish for sympathy.

But Dr. Macklevaine was not much interested in Humphrey except as the son might minister to the needs of the mother.

"Ah?" he said vaguely. "Things often come like that. We must face them."

He sighed, thinking of Dioneme.

"It's time for me to be off," he added in a moment. "I have a hernia operation in the hospital at three."

"It's a good thing to have work," said Humphrey mechanically.

CHAPTER XIII

"I'M anxious about Mrs. Wylde, sir. Do you know where she is?" Humphrey had just come in, a little after twelve at night, to find Parker waiting for him in the hall, with something stealthy added to the usual discretion of her attitude.

"In bed and asleep, I thought. What do you mean!"

Presentiment leaped at him like the flame from a suddenly lighted match.

"Mrs. Wylde had some dinner on a tray upstairs," said Parker. "She told me that she was going to read for a while and that I was not to disturb her, but come when she rang. I waited until after eleven—nearly half past, then I thought she might have fallen asleep, so I went to the door and listened. There wasn't a sound. I knocked, but got no answer, so I ventured to open the door, sir. Mrs. Wylde was not in the sitting-room, nor in her bedroom. I saw the tea gown she had been wearing lying on a chair, and the hat she puts on mornings and one of her tailor suits were missing from the wardrobe. Then I knew she must have

gone out. I ran down and asked Ellen and she said she thought she heard a door closed about ten o'clock, but persuaded herself she just imagined it." Parker paused and looked at Humphrey with a sharp query in her eyes, though her face was otherwise passive.

"Did Mrs. Wylde eat much dinner?" he asked.

"No, sir, she hardly touched it. She asked me to get her some champagne, sir, but I persuaded her that it was impossible."

Parker's eyes were cast down. Her little speech was like a message delivered in cipher, as it were, to be read only by one who held the key, and of more sinister meaning than the words themselves made apparent.

Humphrey felt convinced now of the maid's loyalty and discretion.

"You've no idea, whatever, where my mother might have gone?"

"No, sir, it is so long since she has been out of an evening." Parker reflected for a moment. "There's a cab-stand just around the corner," she suggested. "She might have taken a hansom there in case she wanted one."

Humphrey had his hand on the door, ready to go out again. "Send the other servants to bed and wait for Mrs. Wylde yourself," he said, as he opened it. As yet he had no plan for himself. He must take time

to think one out. To call in the aid of an outsider was not to be thought of—at least until it became imperative.

Parker had spoken of a cab-stand, the one on—— Street, no doubt. He turned in that direction, unable at the moment to think of anything better. In front of the Club there were only two cabs, four wheelers, the drivers asleep on their respective boxes. Humphrey woke up the nearest and asked him if he could give any information about a lady who had taken a cab there earlier in the evening.

"What kind of a lady?" asked the man. He was fat and unmannerly, with a bloated red face, and addressed Humphrey from his lofty seat with what seemed disdain.

"A tall, thin lady, very pale, with reddish hair and dark eyes," said Humphrey, marvelling painfully that he should be describing his mother to an insolent, Irish cab-driver. The man settled down to his slumbers again and closed his eyes.

"Feller ahead had a party like that, about ten o'clock," he let fall grudgingly. "Ye kin ask him about her."

The man on the next cab had a thin, smoothly shaven face, of the English type, lined and pinched with hard experience, yet with a kind of protesting and sardonic humor in it. Yes, he remembered his fare, of

course, why shouldn't he—he had had only two that evening. He had taken her to a hotel on —— Street, but she hadn't stayed a minute, hurried out as if she were angry and told him to drive about a little—anywhere—she wanted the air. After they had been driving for about fifteen minutes she put her head out of the window and told him to stop. It was in front of the "Windermere." She paid him his fare and he saw her go into the restaurant. The cabman had the indifferent manner of one who can be surprised by nothing; but his regard, as he bent it on Humphrey, had a certain penetrating quality. Of this Humphrey saw nothing. He felt grateful for the unconcern of the man's words. It made things, if possible, less overwhelming to face. For an instant he glanced up vaguely at the huge office-building, overtopping them, surging in the sky like a stupendous wave which threatened to break on their heads. The sparsely scattered electric lights in front of the club flared into the gaping blackness of an empty lot opposite, which was piled with the formless, uncouth débris of a recently demolished house.

"Drive to the Windermere—and be quick about it," he said, and jumped in the cab. It had the sour, musty smell of all such vehicles, the cocoa mat under his feet felt damp and slimy, the windows were shut and spattered with mud. They started forward with

a lurch, bumping over a deep hole in the asphalt pavement.

"So *she* came!" said Humphrey to himself and the thought repeated itself mechanically over and over in his brain until he felt himself actually in his mother's place and began to almost sickeningly understand some of her misery, the intense, irresistible, bodily craving, the wavering will, the horror of life which engulfed her and would not let her go, nerves, imagination, tortured until they shrieked for any way of escape, even the most degraded.

In the distance he saw the monstrous flare of Broadway ablaze with electric signs which looked like fireworks fixed immutably in the sky.

The side street led, tunnel-like and dark, toward all this brilliance. Just before they reached it the cab stopped. "Windermere" Humphrey read in letters of light. He jumped out.

"Shall I wait?" asked the driver.

"Yes—wait," said Humphrey over his shoulder. He pushed open the glass doors, covered with curtains of dark green silk, and went in.

A drunken man, well-dressed, elderly, what remained of a gentleman, rolled in beside him, carrying some bills tightly clenched in one hand and a red rose in the other.

A boy took Humphrey's hat and coat and disap-

peared with them up a mysterious stairway which led from the outer hall, and he was then shown into a large square room on the left of the entrance—a room like a roofed-over patio, with an upper balcony, decked with the puckered-up flags of all nations and with enormous, many-colored Japanese lanterns. The walls were all of looking-glass and covered with lattice-work over which trailed dusty imitation wistaria vines. Under his feet the dirt on the floor scraped like sand.

He was conscious of a riot of colors, of the overpowering smell of food and wine and strong cigars, and a din of coarse voices and laughter. Between the lattice-work the mirrors reflected this scene in an interminable series of gaudy squares, which seemed to fit into each other like boxes, or be laid in quaint, mosaic-like patterns.

Here, where any woman might enter alone and unquestioned, Humphrey was to look for his mother. He began to pick his way slowly among the crowded tables. Many bold eyes, mocking, leering, or indifferent, looked up at him from under rakish hat brims. He came across the old man who had entered the restaurant with him lolling at a small table and contemplating his rose vacantly with a maudlin smile.

"Woman is a flower—lasts but an hour—" he was mumbling to himself. The musicians played with Ital-

ian fervor the intermezzo from "Cavalleria," and followed it by "The Rosary." For the moment sentimentality was uppermost. A girl with her feathered hat at a grotesque angle on the back of her head began to sob violently. Then a new party came in—prosperous, underbred Jews. They were greeted with shouts and good-natured jests from their apparently numerous friends, and sat down noisily, near the centre of the room.

A low-browed waiter with a filthy mop began to move nonchalantly up and down, as intent merely on his task of cleaning up the floor as if it had been six o'clock in the morning and he alone in a deserted room.

Humphrey, half desperate, reflected that if his mother were really here she would be in some quiet corner, if there were such a corner. He dreaded asking questions of an employee—he must find her alone. Once more he passed the table of the old man with the rose, who was still crooning to himself:

"Woman is a flower—lasts but an hour."

Very soon Humphrey saw Dioneme. She was not sitting in a corner, but at a small table on the side of the room, half concealed by the musicians, staring in front of her in a kind of stupor.

A black chiffon veil covered her low hat and her hair, and framed her delicately cut face. She looked very

ill and wan, half unconscious, and her whole body was relaxed as if with mortal fatigue.

Her distinction, even so, was painful. A group of men at an adjacent table were watching her curiously and whispering among themselves. Humphrey took the seat opposite her as if he had been expected and was merely keeping an appointment.

When she saw him she looked bewildered and alarmed for a moment, then a flush mounted to her forehead and faded, leaving her whiter than before. She made no effort to speak.

Humphrey took a block of white paper from his pocket and pushed it, with a pencil, across the table to her.

"Well," he said pleasantly, "have you got enough material? Do you want to make any notes?"

The men at the next table still stared, but with less curiosity.

"Writing up the Windermere for the papers!" said one.

"Had her drink too soon," replied another with a chuckle. "She'll say now there are two Windermeres chasing each other round the block."

"Something wrong there," said the third man, shaking his head, as he regarded Humphrey giving an order for two large cups of black coffee.

Later the attention of these critics was distracted by

a noisy quarrel between a young mulatto girl and her escort—and the subsequent intervention of the manager of the Windermere.

Dioneme and Humphrey exchanged no words. She sipped a little of the black coffee, her hand trembling, and then played aimlessly with the pencil and the block of paper. She looked physically on the verge of fainting, but a vague and rather sweet smile hovered on her lips—as if she brooded over some pleasant thought. She seemed now to have quite forgotten her surroundings and even Humphrey.

He wondered if she would be able to walk unsupported out of the room.

"Drink a little more coffee," he said to her insistently, and she obeyed him under the spell of suggestion.

Now the beneficent power of the actual and the concrete asserted itself over Humphrey. He ceased to vibrate under the horror of the situation, was no longer even conscious of why he and his mother were there.

His mind, with nothing more in it, as it were, than affectionate solicitude for a convalescent, fixed itself on the possibility of her walking the length of the room.

Finally he decided that the moment had come. He paid the waiter and helped his mother out of her chair. She tottered very slightly as she rose to her feet.

"Take my arm," he said hurriedly, "the air in this place is sickening," and so, he supporting her, they left the restaurant, few noticing their departure.

While he was standing on the sidewalk giving the direction to the cab driver, a couple passed, the hard light from the electric lamp illuminating their faces—a slight girl with straggling golden hair and a cheap, showy dress and, to Humphrey's momentary dismay, Walter Jackson. Had Jackson noticed him? No—mercifully,—he was intent on his companion. They drifted past like phantoms, part of the fitfully seen, tragically unimportant life of midnight. He gave them no more thought.

Would his mother try to talk to him on the way home, attempt some incoherent explanation? He asked himself the question half fearfully—but she remained inert, insensible almost. He could feel her weight against his shoulder, heavy and inelastic.

At least his dreadful search was over. God!—the relief of being out of that restaurant!

Parker would be waiting for them. He was glad now that he had Parker for an ally.

When the cab stopped in front of their house he could rouse his mother but slightly and that with great effort, and he was obliged to almost carry her up the old-fashioned, brown-stone steps. The door opened

before he had found his key. Parker must have been in the hall and heard the carriage. They exchanged a glance bare of pretence, and together got Dioneme upstairs to her own room.

CHAPTER XIV

WALTER JACKSON, emboldened by the adverse criticism of Humphrey which was generally expressed by his acquaintances, now discarded his former methods and came out openly as his detractor. The facts, which seemed undeniably to support his assertions were presented to Linda on various occasions separately or in sum, not brutally, but with an insinuating persuasiveness. Humphrey lived on his mother, there was no doubt of it, was too indolent and inefficient to do anything for himself and, with petty suspicion, tried to keep from Dioneme's presence any one whom he thought might obtain too great an influence over her. While these statements could never be denied they never, on the other hand, quite destroyed Linda's instinctive sympathy with Humphrey, that cry toward him which seemed to come at once from body and from soul. The world, or that part of it represented by her own immediate surroundings, grew oddly meaningless and unsatisfactory.

Even when she was pleasantly busy with familiar things a feeling of unreality often took possession of her; she seemed to herself to be moving through some

stiff, formal dance, her very garments like a masquerade garb, the smile on her lips set and as if assumed for a part. And all the time she longed to live, which, though she did not know it, meant that she longed to love. Humphrey had awakened the sex in her, but though she was no longer entirely a child, she was not quite a woman, for a woman would have almost certainly divined that her lover had some secret care, suffered under some not dishonorable obligation.

The door which had partly opened for Linda, giving glimpses of confusing happiness, had been closed again by her own impulsion.

Her mind was full of regret for what she had never had, of sadness and revolt and sweet uncertain tenderness.

People said that she had never been so pretty; admirers of course hovered around, tantalized and allured, but she classed them together, a mere group, and failed to single out individuals. Of them all Jackson was the only one who came near to her—the old friend whom she had known so long, on whom she could depend, who walked and rode with her, visited the same houses, knew the same people. And they were so often seen together that their names were coupled openly—though of this she suspected nothing.

It was spring now, the season was over, every day the ocean liners carried hundreds away from New

York, and country houses were being opened in Long Island, Tuxedo and Westchester.

Unrest was in the air, a disturbing fever. At night Linda could not sleep because of April—April throbbing in the dark outside. She seemed to see, even in her curtained room, the budding trees of the park tossing lightly against a starlit sky and the thought of the spring, warm, perfumed, all-conquering, haunted her, kept her witch-bound, dreaming though awake.

So, for days at a time, she seemed to herself to have two selves: one lightly gay, self-satisfied enough, the other like an ill and peevish child crying unceasingly for some toy denied to it.

Jackson dropped in at tea time one unusually warm afternoon. He found Linda alone. The curtains had been drawn to keep out the too searching sun, but through the windows came a constant whirring noise from the motor-busses stationed in front of the house, and the shouts of some Italian children who, living in Avenue A, found Fifth Avenue a convenient playground. The drawing-room was full of potted hyacinths and narcissi, and in the warmth and perfume one was conscious of the fine dust which came in with the air from outside, and of a general oppressive intrusion on the part of the city. Was it the moment for Jackson to have chosen for a declaration of his hopes and desires? Who can tell!

Linda, though she listened gently, not too surprised, refused to give any definite answer, put him off, was irritating, coquettish, even, he felt, insincere. But on the other hand anything was better than a direct refusal. He was confident of winning her in the end.

After this scene Linda felt mysteriously the need of justifying herself in her treatment of Humphrey. It occurred to her that she had never sought to find out indirectly, but from Dioneme herself, the truth about him. While the mother would never accuse her son, or perhaps consciously admit even to herself his shortcomings, she would certainly betray the reality unawares.

It had been a long time since Linda and her friend had met, not indeed since the finality of the former's talk with Humphrey in the park. At first a certain shyness or pride had kept Linda away, afterward she had made several attempts to go to Dioneme, but had always been put off on a plea of absorption in a piece of literary work, absence from town, or ill health. The base thought that it was Humphrey who had, by way of punishment for her treatment of him, prevented her from seeing his mother, several times entered Linda's brain, a mean and unwelcome thing, but not easily ejected. As soon as she had decided to make another effort toward a meeting with Dioneme she went to the telephone and called up the Madison Avenue house.

When Humphrey's voice answered her she was extraordinarily taken aback, hesitated for a word, much to her annoyance, but finally managed to say that she would like to speak to Mrs. Wylde.

"Who is it?" asked the voice again.

It surprised her even over the telephone with its power to induce in her a nervous tremor.

"Linda Arnold," she replied. There was a rather long pause, then Humphrey spoke again.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but my mother is not well and can't come to the telephone just now. Can I give her a message?"

That was all—no acknowledgment of Linda herself as anything but an abstract personality.

"Will you ask your mother when she can see me—just we two, alone, for a little talk?" said Linda, striving to make her voice as unconcerned as Humphrey's seemed to be. A girlish terror seized her. What if Humphrey should think she was making some advance toward a new understanding with himself? She grew hot at the thought and felt like precipitately hanging up the telephone receiver, but the wretched thing held her like some soulless machine which she had set in motion and could not stop.

"Will you hold the wire, or shall I call you up later and let you know what she says?" came Humphrey's voice. Its accent of remote courtesy angered Linda

unreasonably, but what else could she wish? Again she regretted her impulse to telephone but her resolve to see Dioneme remained with her.

"I'll hold the wire," she said.

During the minutes which elapsed before Humphrey's return, as she sat holding the receiver, she had an odd impression that unexpressed and incoherent communications were passing along the line between her house and his. And these intelligences, presumably of the utmost importance, she was incapable of grasping. It was as if she sat, impotently, with a thread of destiny in her hand.

Presently she heard his voice again and with the resumption of material intercourse her fancy of the psychic became immediately grotesque.

"My mother wants very much to see you," said Humphrey, "but the doctor has told her she must have a few days of absolute rest, a week perhaps. She will write to you at the end of the time and name a day for you to come."

"Thank you," replied Linda and hung up the receiver without further formality.

"She will *never* write!" she said to herself with vexed conviction. But nevertheless she waited a week with a certain amount of hope. At the end of that time she was assured that Humphrey had determined to keep her away from his mother at all costs and no

inquiry into his possible motives could produce for her mental consideration anything but the unworthy. But now her spirit of opposition was really aroused. She *would* see Dioneme! Therefore one afternoon she drove to the well-known house on Madison Avenue, mounted the steps with an amusing air of dogged resolve, and rang the bell.

Chance was on her side, for, as the door was opened by the maid, Linda caught sight of Emma Cooper standing in the hall, cloaked and hatted, apparently just on the point of taking her departure.

"Oh, is that you, Emma!" said Linda, not giving the maid an opportunity to deliver the formal message that her mistress was not at home. "How is Mrs. Wylde? And could you arrange for me to see her a moment?"

Thus appealed to as an authority and a power Emma was easily influenced.

"Why, go right in the parlor, Miss Arnold," she said genially. "It's been a long time since you were here, seems to me. She's been real ill—had a relapse after getting over the *grippe*—but I believe it will do her good to see you. Doctors don't know anything, anyway!" Having wiped out all the pretensions of medical science in this swift and ruthless way, Emma went upstairs to interview her employer. She came back with a shade less enthusiasm in her manner.

"You're to go right up," she said, "but I guess you better not be there too long, she seems real weak and nervous to-day."

"I'll only stay a little while," said Linda, but lingered before she turned upstairs.

"How are you getting on?" she asked Miss Cooper, pleasantly. "I've heard nothing about you for so long."

The typist reddened a little with embarrassment.

"Well," she replied hesitatingly, "things *have* been better than now, but I was never one to complain."

Linda looked at her more attentively and perceived that her hat and boots were shabby and that she was wearing cotton gloves. She smiled at Miss Cooper with gentle friendliness.

"You mustn't forget me," she said, "if you ever need any help. Perhaps I might be able to hear of some work for you. Do you promise?"

"Yes, I promise," Miss Cooper answered, as if the words were wrenched from her with difficulty. She infinitely disliked receiving favors, but her admiration for Linda was great and throttled her pride. Miss Arnold was not so much beauty and romance nor even kindness to her perhaps as she was part of that Olympian world of fashion, merely to read of which was a debauch of the imagination. She longed now to tell Miss Arnold that she had seen in the paper that

morning a description of the dress the former had worn at a wedding, but her courage failed her, and the moment was soon over, for Linda, with her pretty smile, turned inexorably toward the stairs.

Now that she was really on the point of seeing Dioneme again, her pulses began to beat a little faster and she was conscious of a certain suspense and doubt in her anticipation of the meeting. Weeks had gone by since she had last been with Dioneme and in those weeks she felt, complacently, that she had grown older, more perceptive and experienced. Would her friend seem the same to her? A first glimpse reassured her of her own fidelity of impression, for Dioneme, looking up at her from a low chair with her whimsical and evasive smile, sent out the old swift message of charm and power.

"Linda! Linda! Linda!" she cried. "Your name has rung in my head so often, like a little silver bell, and here you are again at last!"

"I have tried to come ever so many times," said the girl, "but you always put me off."

"Ah, that was Humphrey—Humphrey with the doctor to back him up. They keep me a prisoner!"

Linda clutched instantly at this confirmation of her suspicions, but under the influence of Dioneme's mature and absorbing personality they seemed, all at once, of less importance. She began once more to

realize that she was inexperienced and shy, but, notwithstanding, pursued her investigation.

"Then you don't feel, yourself, so very ill?" she asked, sitting down by Dioneme.

"Not ill enough to have my hands tied!"—a look almost like petulance crossed Mrs. Wylde's face—"but please don't talk of me—at least not of my state of health. Let us talk of real things. Did you read my book?"

"Of course," said Linda.

"Well?"

Linda hesitated.

"It was wonderfully good, but I was a little disappointed because there seemed to me so little of yourself in it."

"You mean of the self that you personally know, little Linda."

Linda was abashed.

"Perhaps," she admitted.

"Each individual knows a separate bit of one," said Dioneme, "but put all together and added up they don't make one's real self."

She was silent for a moment, lost in thought and Linda, meanwhile, studied her face. Yes, she had changed; her eyes always deeply set now looked sunken, her lips had a purplish tinge. She looked as if she had suffered.

"I suppose," went on Dioneme finally, "only ourselves know our selves—and that merely at intervals, when other things permit."

"It frightens me, somehow, to think that!" said Linda.

"Did you never feel," asked Dioneme, sitting upright and speaking with more vivacity, "as if you had wandered away from your Self, left it sitting alone in some far-off place?"

"I don't quite know what you mean," said Linda; but she began to feel the rising tide of half-mystical excitement which Dioneme often unloosed for her.

"Sometimes," the older woman continued a little wistfully, "I find it so lonely in the world without my Self, I try to go back to the place where I seem to have left her and am in terror lest I should not be able to find the road—the turning, twisting road!"

"Can no one else ever find one's Self?" asked Linda, thinking of the instincts of love.

"No one," Dioneme answered with strange conviction. "Self always sits alone; when I am away from mine I seem only to remember the place dimly, but it is like a dark forest, where there is music—like the music of violins, only deeper, perhaps—and a white starlight, and many flowers."

Dioneme's voice made the words poetry. There

was a silence after she had finished. Linda was almost afraid to speak.

"Are the flowers lilies?" she asked at last.

"Yes," said Dioneme dreamily, "the flowers are lilies."

Why had Linda come? She strove to remember clearly. Oh, yes, to find out, indirectly, whether the rumors in regard to Humphrey's treatment of his mother were true or false.

She looked at her friend as she lay back among her cushions fingering the long string of green jade beads she was wearing and was impressed more than ever before with the belief that the real events of life concerned her but little, except as they furnished stimulus to the imagination or were suited for picturesque reproduction. Dioneme was not worldly, she was not even material—and it was this rare and exquisite creature, so Linda reflected, whom Humphrey allowed to support him in self-chosen idleness. The thing was unbelievable! There must be some explanation. She summoned all her courage to ask a direct question.

"It isn't good, I should think, for you to be too much alone. Isn't your son able to be with you much?" In her endeavor to look carelessly un-self-conscious she felt as if she were making strange grimaces.

"He is almost always with me," Dioneme answered, and one might have fancied there was a note of dissatisfaction in her voice.

"What about his work?" Linda asked again, her heart beating violently as she put the question.

"Haven't you heard? He's given up his office—a pity, I think, he was more contented when he had something to do." Dioneme spoke as if a child had given up playing marbles. The thing, evidently, had no significance to her. She was above all mean mistrust. Linda's immense pity for her friend, lit now by indignation, made it hard for her to listen to the former's absorbed setting forth of the plot for a new story which she had in mind. Was it not on the income from that story that Humphrey, partially, at least, was to be maintained! And Dioneme was an ill woman, no longer young. She had certainly faded since Linda saw her last. How large even her slender hands looked on her emaciated arms! The vitality in her seemed largely of the mind, a flickering gleam illuminating physical decay. She seemed tired now. Perhaps Linda's visit had already been too long. She glanced at the clock remembering Emma Cooper's words. Yes, it was time for her to go.

Dioneme made no protest when she rose. She did not even ask her to come again though her good-by was affectionately given.

"When you kiss me I feel sad, Linda," she said. "I wonder why!"

At the door the young girl turned for another look, but Dioneme lay back with her eyes closed and did not see her.

Every detail about the languid figure and its surroundings stamped itself on Linda's memory: the translucent green jade beads which lay among the folds of Dioneme's dress, the flowering plant on the table, the deep purple of a book-cover, a picture-frame in dull gold. The glow of the late afternoon focussed it all into a warm and subtle harmony, like an illuminated missal.

"Good-by," said Linda, and closed the door softly behind her. Certainly the visit had given her no reason for regretting the renunciation of her lover.

CHAPTER XV

THE care of his mother having been forced on him to the exclusion of other things, Humphrey accepted it dispassionately as an unavoidable obligation, but did not applaud himself by repeating fine phrases in regard to duty and unselfishness. He had nothing of the spiritual exaltation of the religious zealot to console him; self-sacrifice seemed to him a womanish virtue at the best (renunciation being emphatically for the feeble), and he would have been annoyed to have had it attributed to him.

There was more of the soldier in him than the visionary. Life was discipline, one submitted without overmuch thought of personal justice or injustice, one was part of an organization.

What pity he felt was for his mother. She was a woman and Humphrey was capable of an unreasoning tenderness toward women. They often seemed to him to have been but poorly equipped by their Creator for the field on which they were to engage.

Sometimes when he felt that Dioneme was tired of his constant presence (in spite of his efforts at dissimulation she easily divined that she was watched)

he made an effort and sallied temporarily into the world. Peters, too, dragged him now and then to the play. They started on one of these expeditions a certain evening toward the end of April, Peters bent on the process of what he called diverting Humphrey's mind. The theatre, when they reached it, had the warm dimness of an underground aquarium, the light coming through thick shades of green glass. It was quaint, unpleasant and, according to the theories of the decorator, eminently artistic. The boxes, as it happened, were more brightly lighted and hung conspicuously next the stage over the heads of the audience. As Peters and Humphrey took their seats a number of people entered the box on their side of the house. Peters, with great vexation, recognized Linda Arnold and gave Humphrey a quick side-glance, full of dismay. By what observation, intuition, and hearsay he had divined all the latter's secrets it would be impossible to say, but they were undeniably in his possession.

Linda came to the front of the box like Juliet walking out on her balcony, as young, as beautiful, as fit for love, and Peters foresaw that it would be a hard evening for old Humphrey.

"I hope to God she sits where he can't see her!" he breathed with inward fervor, but, signalled by her hostess, Linda placed herself where her lovely head was

outlined against a Fra Angelico background of gold pillar, startling almost in its effectiveness. Humphrey's eyes were bent on his programme. If he had seen he gave no sign.

"Who are these people acting to-night?" he asked. "Never heard of any of them before!"

"Oh, yes," replied Norris, absent-mindedly," you've forgotten!"

He now observed with increased dismay that Walter Jackson had seated himself behind Linda in the box and was leaning over, talking into her ear with an air of willingly advertised devotion.

"Damn it all!" said Peters to himself, and aloud: "I think you'll like that scene in the desert, the one in the third act, remember, I told you about it."

"Is it a desert with real sand?" asked Humphrey with a dreary attempt at humor which Peters applauded with a mirthless but well-intentioned laugh.

He saw his friend glance upward, constrainedly, and as if against his violent determination, at the upper box.

"Why the devil doesn't the thing begin?" exclaimed Peters nervously; but just then the curtain rose on a solemn convent scene.

"Thought you said it was an *amusing* play?" said Humphrey somewhat querulously. He found Peters's society intolerable. Peters he knew was secretly sym-

pathizing with him—watching to see how he felt, and his attempts to be tactful, to deal with the situation skilfully, to direct Humphrey's attention, made the latter feel like homicide.

"It *is* amusing, I mean entertaining. I didn't know you expected a roaring farce. Perhaps we had better try something else," replied Peters, opening a way of escape if Humphrey should be inclined to take it.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the latter with an effort at good-humor. "This is all right. The convent surprised me, that's all."

But when the play was well on, and Norris fell perforce into silence, Humphrey found that his friend's well-meant offices had not been without their small success. Left to himself it was as if all his past weeks of stoic endurance had massed themselves together to break upon him now irresistibly. At each glance he stole at Linda and Jackson a new pang smote him, physical in its intensity. Yet in spite of all, each turn of Linda's head, each movement of her hand was, in a way, dear to him and put immediately away in his memory for eternal preservation.

Once, indeed, her look was turned downward toward the audience; she seemed to be gazing directly at him, but he had no means of guessing whether she saw him or not. She gave no sign. Meanwhile the play went on in what appeared confusion and inanity. Its

sense escaped Humphrey altogether, he saw the actors coming and going, speaking, moving their hands, as an animal might have seen them, with keen but unapprehending vision.

After the end of the first act he and Peters went out to get a breath of air and smoke a cigarette. Standing together in silence they watched several thin, long-legged young men in evening clothes dart across the street from the theatre to a small café opposite, as grotesque as adjutant birds.

"Have a drink with me?" said Peters, "do you good!"

"No," said Humphrey shortly.

"I was mistaken about this play," said Peters again, after a pause. "Rotten bad stuff! Think it's worth going on with it?"

Again he hinted at escape, feeling as cunningly diplomatic as a mother with a difficult child to manage.

"Do as you like," replied Humphrey, "I'm going to see it through."

They went back to their seats and Linda, who had apparently been chatting with some one in the back of the box, at almost the same moment resumed her place of beatitude against the gold pillar. During the second act Humphrey did not once raise his eyes to her.

"Who knows what it costs him," thought Peters.

"He's up against it this time sure enough, poor old Humphrey!"

On the stage the heroine, dismounting from a real Egyptian donkey, was about to enter the tent her lover had prepared for her in the desert. The audience, enchanted with the donkey, were preparing to have their nerves pleasantly titillated by what was understood to be a more than usually indecorous love scene, when suddenly a shrill cry exploded in the gallery. There was something in the crude, piercing terror of this cry which froze that first inevitable impulse to laugh at the unexpected, common to all Americans. This was tragedy, swift, unmistakable—but what, *what?*"

The house rose to its feet with a simultaneous movement, faced the galleries, and swayed for a moment in heavy bewilderment, like a savage and unwieldy animal suddenly confronted with danger.

The cry rang out again, more intense this time, terrible in its concentration of fear.

"Fire—is it *fire!*" said some one to his neighbor. The word was instantly caught up, repeated, itself a conflagration.

Humphrey found himself, he never knew how, halfway up the stairs leading to Linda's box. He met her hurrying down, white-cheeked, and they stood face to face for an instant in the beginning of a wild turmoil,

and looked into each other's eyes. Then, almost immediately, Linda was drawn back from above, there seemed to be a sudden calm in the theatre. During that moment on the stairs some change had taken place in the spirit of the audience.

Humphrey, wondering, turned back and met Norris Peters, who was laughing. People had resumed their seats, and were talking together with relief and pleasant animation, the actors prepared to go on with the play.

"A tempest in a tea-pot," said Peters. "Man fainted in the gallery and his wife thought he was dead and got hysteria."

"It was touch and go," remarked Humphrey. "Half a minute more and we should have had a panic."

His own moment of tremor had been that meeting with Linda on the stairs. The marvel of it stayed with him. Why had they sought each other instinctively, without conscious will or intention? What had her eyes said to him? He could not answer, but his trouble of the earlier part of the evening grew less. During that brief moment with Linda on the stairs, something in her had responded to him, of that he felt sure; their natures had met in a mysterious flash as once before when he had dared to hope that he might win her.

Now, indeed, he had given up the thought of personal happiness. Linda was not for him. That he accepted or persuaded himself he did, fixing his mind on other obligations. Notwithstanding, the lightening of his pain persisted.

The play went on, and now as he looked furtively from time to time at the upper box (Peters still watched him) it seemed to Humphrey as if Linda, against her gold pillar, was languid and absent-minded.

Once, in fact, she turned slightly and seemed to be searching the audience. Could it be for him!

But destiny was malignly capricious to Humphrey that night, played pitch and toss with him unmercifully. The party in the box left a little before the play ended. When they departed Peters heaved a sigh of immense relief as if a burden had been removed from him, and—the curtain finally lowered—and he began to talk to Humphrey for the first time that evening with his usual ease and spontaneity. Progress toward the door was slow and in the vestibule they were stopped altogether. A light rain had begun to fall outside and the unforeseen demand for taxi-cabs and hansoms was impossible to supply at once. The crowd, wedged together in almost indecent promiscuity, was for the most part tolerant and patient, chatting witlessly about the play.

Surrounded on all sides by plump and over-scented

femininity, Humphrey found himself, little by little and from fear of uncivil resistance, propelled away from his companion. Behind him two women, one of whom kept unconsciously prodding his arm with an object which he conceived to be a small bag containing opera-glasses, talked together in cultivated but somewhat acidulous accents.

"One never sees a human being one knows at the play nowadays," said one voice. "Where do all these people come from?"

"From Duluth and Hoboken," responded the other, evidently sharing the general New York opinion that the above cities have only a humorous significance. "But you forget Linda Arnold!"

Humphrey felt an overpowering desire to escape, but, short of exercising that force which, directed against woman, is traditionally supposed to be unmanly, this was impossible. He was as annoyed at hearing Linda's name mentioned in this way as if he had been confronted unexpectedly, in a public place with some blatant poster representing her face.

"Oh, yes, Linda Arnold!" repeated the first voice, aggravating the offence, "she looked very well to-night, too, but I can't say I admire her as much as some people do. It isn't a type I especially care for."

"She doesn't look as well as she did. She has grown thinner, I think."

Humphrey, urged to desperation, once more essayed to move forward, but the expanse of purple satin evening cloak in front of him resisted like a granite wall. Over the tops of outrageously coiffed heads, heavy with curls, he looked out at rain-splashed Broadway, an unattainable paradise.

"It's the first time I've seen her since her engagement to Walter Jackson was announced," said the voice behind him placidly, and at the words, the theatre, the people, Broadway and the world suddenly faded from Humphrey's consciousness. But the voice persisted:

"Why, I didn't know it *had* been formally announced!"

"Two days ago, but it hasn't been in the papers yet."

Here for some undiscoverable reason the crowd suddenly surged forward and Humphrey found himself beside Peters once more and near the door.

"The sea has given up its dead!" exclaimed the latter with humorous intent. A glance at Humphrey's face, however, alarmed him.

"What's up now!" thought this intuitive and long-suffering friend.

With all the sympathy in the world it is hardly possible to take the love affairs of others with the unfailing sympathy they deserve, and for one shameful moment

Peters felt that the evening had been a very irksome one, and wearied a little of his rôle of silent supporter. Moreover, as he was thirty, six years older than Humphrey, he took a more or less elderly view of passion and permitted himself to hope that the latter would outlive his present sufferings.

But to Peters's credit it must be said that this callousness was quickly forgotten and he became all unselfishness again in the consideration of Humphrey's actual state, which showed itself in a sudden outburst of ill humor against the construction of the theatre, its general management, and particularly its way of handling a departing audience.

Such irritability, almost unprecedented in Humphrey, showed that his nerves were in a bad state.

"Well, well," said Peters soothingly. "You're right about the construction of the theatre. This kind of thing is outrageous." He busied himself with securing a taxi-cab, but when he had finally succeeded, Humphrey refused to share it with him saying that he wanted a walk.

"Best thing for him, perhaps," reflected Peters assenting to this; but as he drove off he retained an unpleasantly vivid impression of his friend's face as he stood, vacant-eyed, in the rain.

CHAPTER XVI

DR. MACKLEVAINE sat in Mrs. Wylde's drawing-room, his heavy figure sunk in an arm-chair, inelastic, suggestive of momentary despondency. He was alone, waiting for Dioneme, who had been much better for a few days, almost like her old self. In his mind he was reviewing her case, shunning even in the most secret place of his thought the use of a too ugly word.

Lover and physician confronted each other grimly, and the former held the latter dominated though acknowledged the clearer-sighted.

Lover cried to physician: "Save her!" and the physician did not dare respond: "There is no way." To be blind where he saw, to hope where he despaired —that was Macklevaine's problem.

Little by little his mind ceased to struggle with it, drifted back to the past—twenty-three years since he had first known Dioneme! He sighed, ponderously, shifting his weight from one side to another. His eyes fell on a little red amber dog standing on a table near him. He had sent her that bit of amber, he remembered, on one of the first Christmases of their acquaint-

anceship, a trifling acknowledgment of the hospitality she and her husband had extended to him. For years Macklevaine had not, in his simple, science-enveloped and possibly bourgeois soul, conceived the idea that he might have fallen in love with a married woman. Diagnosis of the emotions had never been his specialty. With his eyes still on the little red amber dog, which gleamed like the heart of a fire in the ray of light which fell athwart it, old Macklevaine recalled the moment when a consciousness of what seemed to him his guilt finally reached him.

It had happened one evening when Dioneme stood beside Morris at the foot of the stairs as he was saying good-by late at night to them both. He remembered the gesture, full of tenderness and abandonment, with which Dioneme had thrown back her lovely head against her husband's shoulder. The sudden pang which smote him then had been the birth-pain of conscious passion. Since then—the long road!—the stoicism, the self-denial!—Now he was old.

He brooded with his head on his breast until he heard Dioneme's step. As she came in the room and he looked up at her, he was conscious not merely of her charming, faintly smiling face, her silvery dress, her slow motion, but of a hundred impalpable and outlived things in which she seemed to exist as in an atmosphere.

Around her hung, as it were, in a shimmery nimbus, all that she had suffered, all that she had sinned, her most secret thoughts, her most obscure aspirations. He felt in every fibre a sense of the woman herself, a strangely perfected, composite personality, colored by the passage of experience with a thousand hues as varying as those of some wave-washed shell; yet even in this rare moment of perception she remained mysterious to him.

"Humphrey says I must go away," were Dioneme's first words. Her eyes were troubled as they rested on the doctor's face. There was a certain childish helplessness about her. "Was it you who put it in his head?"

"We certainly spoke of it," said the doctor. "Your health has not been of the best lately; you are tired out from the winter, a little run down. In such cases a change is most advisable."

He spoke with a slightly professional manner, gruffly even. No one would have suspected him of sympathy.

"But where shall I go?" asked Dioneme, still childishly.

"Go abroad for a while, travel, have a new environment, see new people."

Deep in Mrs. Wylde's pathetic eyes something like a flicker from old innocent coquetries lit a gleam.

"But do you *want* me to go, John?"—She did not often call him by his Christian name.

"I want only your own good." There was a little of conscious paladinship in Macklevaine's manner, but he had certainly long proved a claim to it.

"Perhaps it *would* be best. I know Humphrey thinks so. I am not really well. I seem to have no will. Everything is against me." Dioneme spoke ambiguously, with gentle indecision of phrase. Macklevaine wondered if she suspected how much he knew about her. Would she wince under the realization of this knowledge or remain entirely apathetic?

"How soon could you start?" he asked.

"Oh, if I must go, at any time. Parker is very clever. She could pack in a day or two."

"It might be hard to get steamer accommodations just now on such short notice," said the doctor, "though people often give up their rooms at the last moment."

"But we haven't decided yet where I am to go," said Dioneme with a flicker of enthusiasm. "Shall we send for the morning paper?" When it was brought she leaned with the doctor over the slightly smudgy sheet with its acrid odor of printers' ink.

"How exciting they are, steamer notices!" she said. "How full of suggestion! 'The Royal Dutch West India Mail.' Isn't it quaint and delicious! Don't

you smell spices?—and for seventy-five dollars one can take the *Hellig Olav*—fancy it!—and sail straight away to that cold northern sea of Ibsen's, the blue gleam in the background of all his plays."

"Well," said Macklevaine tolerantly, "shall it be either of these?"

"Listen," exclaimed Dioneme, not taking any notice of him, "'The Booth Line, Brazil and Amazon River.' Can't you see those hot, thick forests and hear the parrots scream!—We've all got a glow in the heart of us when we hear the word 'tropics.'"

But as Dioneme leaned near him over the newspaper, a faint, unmistakable aroma made Macklevaine shudder. Lover and physician clasped hands now in mutual trouble. "*Fools! Fools!*" he groaned to himself. "Can't they keep the accursed stuff away from her!"

"Well," he said again a little gruffly, wrestling with the pain in him, "can't you decide? Where will you go?"

"I think, after all, I will go to Paris," said Dioneme unexpectedly. "I need some clothes."

At that moment Humphrey joined them. Even to Macklevaine's unconcern it was apparent that a change had taken place in him. He was thinner, of a less healthy color.

"We are talking of a trip to Europe," said the doctor.

"What do you say to the *Augusta Victoria*, sailing Saturday?"

"Only five days," said Humphrey doubtfully. "Could she do it?"

"Why not!" Dioneme replied. "Some one can close the house for us after we have gone."

Of a sudden she seemed to embrace the project eagerly, and a little more talk decided it. When the doctor left Humphrey went out with him and they walked down the street together. It was warm and the air was full of dust and charged with the smell of gasolene from passing motor-cars. On the street-corner stood a boy with a basket full of mimosa. A man in his shirt-sleeves leaned against an area rail talking to a pretty, bareheaded housemaid. Near the curb-stone stood a hand-cart piled with oranges, bananas, and pineapples. The music of a hand-organ came from the distance. Slowly the city was relaxing into its southern season of heat and shiftless ease.

"You really think then, doctor, that this trip will benefit my mother?" asked Humphrey.

"It is her best chance," Macklevaine replied shortly. He paused for a moment, weighing his words. "I do not say her only one," he added, but as if nothing more than consideration for Humphrey prevented him.

"What am I to do while we are away?" asked the younger man. "Is there any special thing?"

"See that she is not alone, watch her, do not let her be overtired or excited or dull."

Macklevaine adjusted this burden on Humphrey's shoulders without a thought of its weight. Humphrey was the instrument by which Dioneme might possibly be saved, that was all. Lest the old doctor seem too monstrous in his thoughtlessness, it must be said that he envied Humphrey his task, difficult and painful as it was.

"You are sure of the maid, Parker?" he asked, after a pause.

"Quite. She's devoted to my mother, very trustworthy," replied Humphrey, and, in a slightly different tone, "I've had proof, you know, more than once."

"Hm!" grunted Macklevaine. Both men were embarrassed. They had never but once, on the day after Dioneme's visit to the Windermere, talked openly of the situation. "I'm not without a suspicion that your mother sometimes finds means of eluding her still, of eluding you both," said the doctor now. "In these cases one must be forever vigilant. A cunning is sometimes developed beyond belief."

Humphrey gave something like a groan.

"We must never forget," went on Macklevaine, "that in cases like this the amount of moral responsibility is small. Undoubtedly what are called the psychic neurons are slightly diseased" (physician now was

undoubtedly uppermost in him). "We have therefore most distinctly, to my mind, a case of attenuated responsibility; Michelon (you have heard of him, no doubt) would deny the scientific value as well as the practical expediency of this conclusion, considering it, as he has said, a mere formula, a label corresponding to no reality. Possibly, regarded in the light of its legal and social consequence, his theory is open to discussion. I, as a physician, looking at the question from the stand-point of medicine alone, must continue to affirm my diagnosis."

Humphrey had not entirely followed the doctor in this speech, but gathered that he exonerated his mother from the blame of her own condition, and willingly agreed with him. Indeed neither man could have been brought to believe that Dioneme's vice was the outcome of her own character and volition, any more than a malignant growth is part of a natural and healthy organism. But in spite of this faith, upheld by the doctor with such convincing technical phrases, Humphrey felt that he had reached a point where he could discuss his mother no longer. He stopped abruptly at a street-crossing. "I'm taking a taxi here," he said. "Better lose no time, I think, in getting to the steamer-office about those tickets, don't you think so?"

The doctor assenting to this, they separated with mutual relief.

A week later Linda, lunching with Miss Godwin, heard with painful interest a report that Dioneme was seriously ill. Being referred to as an intimate authority she could only say that she had not seen Mrs. Wylde for some time and had heard nothing from her.

"They say," observed one of her fellow-guests, "that her lungs are affected. She certainly has grown painfully thin. I met her in the Chinese shop not long ago, looking at some porcelains, and was quite shocked."

"She was always fragile to look at," said Miss Godwin, "but with immense vitality all the same—contradictory in that as in many things. I've known her a long time, and at some periods have seen a good deal of her, but she is an unknown creature to me still. She is always gentle, even when most brilliant, but when I try to get near her, humanly, as it were, for warmth and affection, why, then, I find myself chilly, awed a little by that same soft strangeness."

Linda had felt this too perhaps, but her loyalty resented Miss Godwin's words. She said to herself that the clever old lady's personality, genial as it might be, was not one that would enable her to approach very closely to Dioneme.

"What humanity Mrs. Wylde has, it seems to me," said another woman, "is put into that wide *general*

sympathy which enables her to write the books she does. She never appears to have much personal feeling.—But I'm very sorry she is ill. Consumption, you say? How dreadful!"

"It's only a rumor," said Miss Godwin stubbornly. "I feel sure it is not true." But Linda, nevertheless, was alarmed and fearful. Something in her deeper nature was touched and reverberated painfully. Of late she had only been moving nonchalantly on the surface of things, occupied with the festivities and manifestations of friendship incident to the announcement of her engagement. She was inclined to agree with Julie that she had settled her future very sensibly and she had allowed the people among whom she had been born and bred to close in around her and shut out the rest of the world. But there was the old thrill at the mention of Dioneme, and was it for Dioneme alone? This question she put aside, conscientiously, but at least she could go to Mrs. Wylde's house to ask after her. That was no more than her duty. She even left Miss Godwin's a little earlier than she had planned in order to do this. It was such a pleasant day that she decided to walk and dismissed her motor, feeling the mild thrill of adventure experienced by young ladies who go on unaccustomed feet through a little-known part of town. Gramercy Park was tranquil enough and not disconcerting, but in Fourth Avenue and

Twenty-third Street she found herself shrinking a little before the grim unconcern of the city. Contemplating it from a new point of view she forgot her personal preoccupation for a moment and saw herself for what she was, an inappreciable atom. Yet, in spite of this, there came to her, flashing through her mind more in inspiration than definable thought, a sense of her own relationship to this stupendous city. How it had formed and constrained her, this vast inchoate, incomprehensible mass! She had been born of it—was its child; its blood was in her veins, its odors clung to her skirts. Even in its very mystery and power it was intimate; everything she felt and did became a part of it, was devoured by its immensity. But this momentary vision swept over her like a cloud. The young do not linger over abstractions. By the time she turned into Madison Avenue her mind was busy again with her own affairs. She thought of her engagement. It had not been an unpleasant experience on the whole. She had had all along the complacent consciousness of having done the fitting and desirable thing; the congratulations of her friends had been unmistakably sincere. But beyond all this was the inevitableness of marriage, and marriage with Walter:—her innocence and her twenty years shrank a little. Was it not better though to begin an indissoluble partnership with some one who had been a life-long friend, trusted for years,

rather than with a chance new acquaintance who had lit a sudden, unaccountable spark in one's nature?

Even as she reasoned with herself in this way, Linda had a faint suspicion that she was grotesquely stereotyped, insincere even.

One of Walter's gardenias sent her that morning, and which she was wearing, fell to the sidewalk. She did not stoop to pick it up.

"I must tell him that I don't care very much for gardenias," she reflected.

Strange that in all these years he had never found it out. Perhaps there were other things about her he would never find out! She wondered.

Now she was approaching the well-known, brownstone house near Thirty-ninth Street. Old times came back to her vividly. Was it altogether anxiety for Dioneme that made her nervous? She evaded the question. What if she should meet Humphrey coming down the steps? Would he stop and speak to her or would they merely look long at each other in silence as on that strange night at the theatre—the night of the threatened panic? The mere imaginative picturing of this possible encounter troubled her inexplicably.

As she walked on she saw that in front of the Wylde house there was a vacuum cleaning wagon. A trail of rubber tubing lay up the steps, unpleasantly reptilian in form and color. The windows were all wide-open

and some one was shaking a dust-cloth from the second floor. A bleak activity seemed generally in progress. The whole place had become meaningless and impersonal, repellent of all hospitality.

"They are certainly having a violent house-cleaning!" thought Linda, endeavoring to reassure herself against what seemed almost certain disappointment.

Her ring at the door-bell was answered after some delay by a frowsy scrubwoman, with bare, red arms and a turned up gingham apron, who looked at Linda with unexplained hostility.

"No," she said, "there's nobody here. The family sailed for Europe two days ago."

"For long?" Linda asked.

"Sure, I don't know nothing at all about it. Ye'll have to find out somewhere else," said the woman, still in her mysteriously aggressive manner.

Linda was on the point of making other inquiries, but checked herself. What was the use!

"Thank you," she said to the warlike Irishwoman, and wishing her good-morning with a politeness which had still some lingering hope of being propitiatory she went down the brown-stone steps again.

She felt suddenly tired and wished she had not sent away her motor-car. What unacknowledged hopes and desires had been in her when she came to the house of Humphrey's mother that now she felt such a

sickness of defeat? She had, as it were, risked a last throw of the dice with fate and been, once for all, defeated.

Youth is always tragically accepting a finality in human relationships (in effect, there is only one). Already Linda had many times said to herself, "This is the end." Once more, and this time with completest conviction, she repeated the phrase. Was she not to marry Walter Jackson in June?

CHAPTER XVII

"I HEAR that your friends the Wyldes have gone away," said Julie, in a light, conversational tone. She and Linda were in the former's sitting-room amid a confusion of key-boxes, inventories, moth-balls, and neatly labelled packages. It was the day before they were to move to the country, and Julie, with her usual system, had been personally supervising the putting-away of many small articles. Now, somewhat tired but complacently aware of having been equal to the situation, she was taking a cup of tea from a japanned tray and with a kitchen spoon, as the household silver had already been sent away.

"Yes, they sailed last week," replied Linda shortly.

"There was always something a little odd about those people, to me," Julie went on. "Apart from their behavior the night of that dinner, I mean. I never liked to say what I really thought of them because I was afraid of hurting your feelings—but lately you have seen so little of them."

"Don't be afraid of hurting my feelings," said Linda in a level tone. "I have heard all kinds of things about Humphrey Wylde."

"But don't you yourself think it a little odd? Here is a man who is dependent on what his mother allows him—he contrives to come between her and all her friends and isolates her so that she can see no one but the people he himself selects. Now I hear they have suddenly left the country with no notice to any of their friends, and giving apparently no address. At least, not a soul seems to know where they have gone."

"They are not, at least Dioneme is not, very conventional, and she has been ill, too, and probably wants to get away from people." There was not much warmth in Linda's defence and Julie felt it and was encouraged to go on.

"Of course I don't altogether believe what some people say—that she has an incurable disease and cannot live long, and that the son, knowing how erratic and easily influenced she is, is worried lest she might be induced to make a will against him."

"Ah, you don't believe that then," said Linda listlessly; Julie was puzzled by something in her sister's accent.

"What do *you* think?" she asked with real curiosity.

"I think we bother our heads far too much about things that don't concern us in the least," exclaimed Linda with sudden and vehement, moral triteness, "and I rather wonder at you, Julie!"

Julie was abashed and lost for a moment her elder-sister air of complete assurance and competency.

"I was only rather sorry for Mrs. Wylde," she murmured lamely.

"In spite of her being 'odd'!"

"Really, my dear, I'm not as narrow-minded as you always seem to think," Julie plucked up courage enough to say. But Linda was not disposed to argue further, and fed Paddy small morsels of buttered toast in silence.

"I'm glad you are going to be married in the country," remarked Julie, after a sufficiently long pause for relations with her sister to resume their perfect equilibrium. "There is nothing so nice as a country wedding, and in June too."

"Yes," assented Linda, "if it's a nice day."

"Have you decided about the bridesmaids' dresses?"

"I haven't even thought of them."

Julie's occasional and distressing suspicion that her sister was unlike other girls had received food from the manner in which Linda contemplated her wedding. Surely it was unnatural and wanting in appropriate feeling. Here a servant came in and informed Linda that a Miss Cooper wished to see her.

"Cooper? Cooper," Linda searched her memory for an instant.—Ah, yes, Emma Cooper, the typist! "Where did you put her, James?"

"She's in the little room downstairs, miss."

"Well, show her into the library and say that I will be down directly."

"Who is 'Emma Cooper'?" inquired Julie.

"Only a working woman I am interested in. I told her once to come to me if she needed help."

"From one of your charities, I suppose," commented her sister, and Linda did not enlighten her further.

In the library she found Miss Cooper, seated on the edge of a chair, plainly embarrassed, not by her surroundings but by her mission. The signs of poverty which Linda had noticed about her at their last meeting were even more evident. When she had with difficulty and not without assistance explained her necessity and Linda had promised to help her she rose to leave, stiffly formal.

"Don't go," said Linda kindly, "stay and tell me a little more about yourself. Are you still at Mrs. Mindelbaum's?"

"Yes," said Miss Cooper, sitting down again, at once voluble and self-possessed when it was no longer a matter of asking favors, "I'm still there. Mindelbaum 's been real considerate. I took a smaller room of course, higher up under the roof. She wouldn't hear of my leaving. Give me the Jews every time, I say!"

"And the little manicure you used to tell me about, Flora—something—is she there too?"

Miss Cooper's face sobered, though its expression of self-importance increased. "Why, it's a long story about Flora," she said, "and I don't want to take up your time."

"I have nothing to do just now," said Linda, "I should like to hear it."

"It's been a great worry to me; I've been at my wit's end about it," began Miss Cooper. "You remember I told you Flora had a beau and used to go out with him, and how the people at Mindelbaum's were beginning to say things and act ugly to her. Well, it went on for some time. I used to talk to her till I guess she hated me, but it wasn't any use. Her head was completely turned because he was a gentleman, or so she said. I never saw him myself. He was always mighty careful about that. When he took her to the theatre she always used to meet him at a restaurant or some such place. Flora tried me a good deal, she was so uppish about it all, and every cent she could scrape together she put on her back. She bought a hat with ostrich feathers that made her look like the picture of an actress—it was becoming enough in a way, but she ought not to have worn it.

"One afternoon in Easter week she came into my room in a great state of excitement and said she was going to a place on Long Island to have supper—going in an automobile.

"'Who's going with you?' I asked, 'any other woman?' She just giggled and said I was a fussy old maid that hadn't had any good times myself and didn't want any one else to have any.

"'I guess I can look out for myself,' she said, 'and anyway my friend is a perfect gentleman.' She had said that so many times it made me sort of sick. Well, off she went in a pale blue chiffon automobile veil she'd bought herself, and somehow she was so kind of childish and happy I didn't feel as mad with her as I ought to have been.

"I didn't expect her home until late, but I had some copying work to do that night so I just thought I'd sit up and see her when she came in. I left the door of my room ajar so I could hear her come up the stairs. She had a key so that she could let herself in without waking up the girl. After eleven the house got quiet. I finished my work and by the time it struck twelve began to worry a little. She hadn't any business to be out alone as late as that. Perhaps something had happened to that old automobile! I got real nervous finally, somehow I *knew* it wasn't the automobile and when I thought of her going off so young and pretty in her blue veil! Well, to make a long story short she never came back that whole night. I just sat, with my heart in my mouth, listening for a step on the stairs. It was awful. I never felt like

going to sleep at all. If Flora had been my own sister I couldn't have felt worse, but, of course, all women are kind of sisters.

"When it began to get light I went into Flora's room and mussed up the bed so that it would look as if some one had slept in it and I poured out some water in the basin and washed my hands and wiped them on a towel. I didn't want any one in the house to suspect anything if I could help it. Later I dressed myself all fresh and went down to breakfast. I guess I must have looked pretty badly, for Mrs. Mindelbaum asked if I was sick.

"'Where's Miss Kelly this morning?'" asked that Lizzie Graham. 'Has any one seen her?'

"'She's not here,' I said, 'she had to be out early today.' So no one thought any more about that.

"I had to go out after breakfast to see a man who had half promised me some work, but I felt pretty miserable, I can tell you. When I got back at one o'clock I went to Flora's door. It was tight shut. I knocked, but got no answer for a minute, so I knocked again. My heart was in my mouth. I had a feeling she was there—but would she let me in? And how would she treat me—sort of hard and defiant? I didn't want to hear her laugh; somehow I knew it would be a different kind of laugh from the one she went away with and I felt I couldn't stand it. After a while I heard Flora's voice saying: 'Who's there?'

"'It's me, Emma Cooper,' I said, and I tried to make my voice a little encouraging, so she wouldn't be afraid of me.

"Then I heard the key turn in the lock, and then Flora's voice said again, 'Come in.'

"Well, I went in and she was lying on the bed, all in a heap, crying. There didn't seem to be anything left of her. She made me think of something that had been broken and thrown away. I tell you, Miss Arnold, I hated that man.

"'Oh, Emma!' she said, when she saw me, and she just threw her arms around my neck and buried her face against me, as if she didn't want me to look at her.

"After a while I went down stairs, and got Mrs. Mindelbaum to let me take her up a cup of tea and a piece of bread and butter. I told Mrs. Mindelbaum Flora had a sick headache. She couldn't eat anything, but she drank the tea and it made her feel better so that she sat hunched up in the bed and told me everything. Well, it's not exactly the story for you to hear."

"No," said Linda mechanically, and shuddered.

"I guess things happen like that pretty often," Miss Cooper went on, "but they seem terrible when they come near to you, and Flora was always one of the kind who have to tell everything sooner or later. She even told me the man's name, 'Walter Jackson,' she said, but naturally it didn't mean anything to me."

At this point Linda startled the narrator by rising abruptly and walking to the window. She had not spoken, but the effect of her action was as if she had given a sharp and sudden cry.

"Why!"—said Miss Cooper, hesitating, amazed. But Linda recovered speedily her presence of mind and turned to face her visitor.

"It is a terrible story," she said, "I felt faint almost for a moment. It is all over now." She looked a little pale, but smiled reassuringly at Emma's anxious concern.

"You're too sympathetic, that's what it is!" exclaimed the typist. "I hadn't ought to tell you things like this."

"Nonsense!" replied Linda, "it's better to know things! Did Flora Kelly ever tell you how the man looked?"

"She always said he was a great swell, tall and thin, with fair hair and he wore an eye-glass."

"Are you sure that was his real name?" she asked again.

"Yes, I'm sure, because she found it out by chance at first. He let an envelope addressed to him fall out of his pocket-book. I guess he wouldn't have let her know it except for that."

"Probably not," assented Linda. Her own calmness and freedom from personal distress amazed her. At the same time she was aware that beneath it all

smouldered an anger so intense that she dreaded being alone and feeling it burst into flame. Though Emma, dimly uneasy, now wished to leave her, she detained her as long as possible.

By dint of questioning she learned that Flora Kelly had left Mrs. Mindelbaum's and gone to stay with a distant connection who had a farm in Indiana.

"She promised to write to me," said Miss Cooper, "but I've only had just a picture post-card from her with 'greetings' on it. Well, I guess the country's the best place for her!" She sighed despondently, pulling the tips of her much-worn gloves.

When she finally left the house, Linda went again to the window and watched her until she disappeared down the street. Amazement at the chances of fate filled the girl's mind for the moment to the rejection of everything else. What was the use of voluntary plans when one's future was taken out of one's hands like this and by an Emma Cooper!

As for Walter, a youthfully intense wrath and disgust again got the better of her, overcame her superstition and her philosophy. What terms were opprobrious enough for him? She even found time amid the clamor of her personal wrongs for a desolate thought of little Flora Kelly. And she had been on the verge of marrying Walter, was still—as far as conventional obligations held.

But at least not an hour need go by before she freed

herself. Burning with indignation, with hurt pride and a sense of stained innocence of mind, Linda hurried to her own room and sitting down at her desk wrote rapidly eight closely filled pages.

After reflection, however, she destroyed the letter and traced on a single sheet a few short words, which, with her engagement ring, she ultimately despatched.

CHAPTER XVIII

MACKLEVAINE had advised a motor-trip as the best means of taking up Dioneme's mind and keeping her in the fresh air, so after a month's stay in Paris Humphrey and his mother, in a hired Renault, started for Brittany. Parker and the essential chauffeur were their only companions.

It was June. The resorts along the coast had not yet been aroused from their out-of-season paralysis, but a sober summer beauty was on the gray land. In Brittany beauty is never riotous. One thinks of it in greens and grays and purples—patches of other colors seem exotic, as when the pine-trees, here and there, wade in seas of yellow broom, or where flat stretches of exotically red clover, the red of painted mosques and Eastern textiles, lie spread out on the plain. It did not rain much during the four weeks Humphrey and Dioneme spent in the country, neither did the sun shine often. Their days were all swift and almost noiseless motion over a flat and generally featureless land, the wash of the sea in their ears often, the clouds scudding over their heads. Occasionally they stopped to look at a cathedral, a provincial museum, some pre-

historic remains, or a row of quaintly gabled sixteenth century houses in some sleepy town. In sight-seeing, however, Dioneme took little interest; she was easily fatigued, almost always absent-minded. What pleased her most was to motor long hours, mostly in silence, with the wind blowing in her face and the incidents of their route constantly exciting her fancy.

"Humphrey!" she would say suddenly, "see that tiny village at the end of this long, long narrow road? Isn't it just like some quaint toy tied to a string!" or again she would call his attention to a field where the early planting had come up in straight parallel green lines, marking the earth like a blank music score.

"Summer will write part of its fantasia there," she would say—whimsically.

A multitude of conically roofed bee-hives in a grove of young trees made her think of the huts of a tribe of savage dwarfs in some miniature forest, and once she talked for a quarter of an hour about a little house they passed which was entirely surrounded by tall, thick currant bushes. Some one had spread a fine white net all over these bushes and it looked, Dioneme said, as if a gigantic spider had spun a web around the house to protect it.

"It might be an enchanted house!" she said.

All this childishness delighted Humphrey. It meant his mother was pleased, diverted, taken out of herself.

At night, when they stopped, she was healthily tired, ate her dinner with unaccustomed appetite and went early to bed. The few books she had brought with her remained unread. Humphrey and Parker exchanged in guarded words their new hopes and reassurances.

"Macklevaine was right," said Humphrey. "It was change she needed—and life in the open air."

But at the end of a month Dioneme grew dissatisfied. All these sea-side places with their empty hotels and silent streets were depressing. She was tired of Brittany, its sad, dull peasants, its grayness, its humility, its remoteness. She wanted to go back to Paris, to hear laughter again, the din of the boulevards, the midnight taxis rattling past her window. "And I want to hear some *ideas* expressed," she said. "We have been living like the lower order of animals—nothing but sensations, to eat, to sleep, to breathe the fresh air! We've forgotten how to think! I believe you're even getting fat, Humphrey."

But this was a delusion. Humphrey had enough on his mind to prevent his caring overmuch for food—and as for sleep—it still often eluded him.

It was not only for his mother he had sought a cure in Brittany. He, too, wanted forgetfulness of the past, a new courage and strength of will. In his own veins was also a poison, insidious, lingering in its traces.

There were times when he despaired, youthfully, of ever ridding himself of this bane. Again he called it by other names, it became his intoxicant, his divine stimulation. Even without hope his feeling for Linda was the one supreme thing. At such times—for Humphrey, considered by her as matter-of-fact, was not the child of his mother for nothing—he set his love, as it were, in a silver shrine and his thoughts went toward it ceaselessly, like pilgrims with their hands full of flowers.

Sometimes he could not rid himself of the conviction that in spite of everything Linda belonged to him, was his, chosen by the gods, eternally sealed. What mattered absence, time, her marriage to another, life itself —in the face of these certainties. In such moods he felt as if between his soul and hers there was always flowing a stream of uncontrolled and intimate thought. Often this stream reflected the very blue of heaven and was strewn with stars, then again its surface was ice-bound, waiting for an awakening sun.

He would rouse himself from these reveries perhaps to curse his imagination and resolve, once and for all, to put Linda out of his mind.

In July Paris was warm and uncomfortable and Dioneme grew worse.

Parker, too, was nervous, almost irritable, unlike herself. She conveyed to Humphrey her feeling that hers

was a most trying and difficult position, and he again raised her wages. It became necessary to be with Dioneme constantly, and once or twice Humphrey even contemplated calling in a physician—a thing he shrank from.

One night when Dioneme had gone to bed early and was apparently asleep he went out and strolled aimlessly down the Rue de Castiglione. It was eight o'clock, the street was almost deserted. Under the arcades the shadows were growing deeper, and the bars were up in front of all the shop windows. An unspeakable dreariness of heat lay like a miasma over the city.

Humphrey felt that his feet dragged heavily as he walked; he breathed in a fine dust with every respiration.

"What wouldn't I give now for a good swim in the sea!" he thought. His muscles hardened at the idea. He imagined himself cutting his way through cold salt water, his eyes full of spray.

Just then he saw a figure coming toward him in the dimness of the arcades. There was something familiar about it! By Jove—it was old Norris! What on earth——!

"Thought I'd surprise you," said Peters, calmly when they had grasped hands. "Landed this morning—Cherbourg. How are things with you, old man?"

"Wait a minute," cried Humphrey, after their first greetings were over. "Have you dined? Why not dine together in the Ritz garden?"

Peters agreed—and they turned back and walked around the Place Vendôme to the hotel. The garden terrace even at that season was full of well-dressed, languid people seated at small tables chatting in a desultory way, eating capriciously, listening now and then to the Hungarian musicians, whose leader, fat and indifferent after many years of hotel service, played American rag-time with scornful skill.

Humphrey and Peters bowed to some acquaintances at one of the tables and found a place for themselves at the end of the terrace nearest the fountain. There they heard a faint trickle of water and the perfume of heliotrope came to them from a garden-bed. Behind the high wall of this tiny and coquettish garden showed the great trees of the garden beyond. One might have imagined oneself anywhere but in the centre of a great city.

"And to think how the trolleys are rattling up Broadway," exclaimed Peters, with a sigh of satisfaction.

"How is business?" asked Humphrey, and listened attentively while his friend told him all that had been done on the Michigan medical college and of the designs he was making for a competition for the construction of a new State building at Washington.

"We are also building a household storage ware-

house for the Zimmerman Company," said Peters, and he and Humphrey fell into a discussion as to the value of steel frame structures with tile or concrete insulating properties compared with a re-enforced concrete construction, which was absorbing to them, but of little general interest.

"*Qu'ils sont drôles—les Américains!*" observed a Nattier-like blonde near them, who tried vainly with the most discreet and artistic ingenuity and through the entire course of dinner to attract their attention. "Of what are they talking?"

"Of everything—*except* the little ladies," said her neighbor at table—also French.

From their profession Humphrey and Peters drifted to politics and considered, though with less ardor, the revolt against Clark, candidate for the New York State Senate of the Tammany leader, and the possible nomination of a compromise candidate.

"For me—it's the beginning of the end for O'Brien," said Peters (O'Brien being the Tammany leader.) "He's been pulling every wire he could lay his dirty hands on to bring the insurgents to terms—but it's no use." He spoke with languid interest. The mood of a summer night in Paris was beginning to steal upon him. For the first time he perceived consciously the Nattier-like blonde and the beauty of her round white throat.

Over their coffee he and Humphrey fell into silence, while the leader of the Hungarian musicians played with accentuated sentimentality a Viennese waltz.

"So your mother is really better," said Peters. He had asked after her at the moment of their meeting.

"Yes—but this heat is bad for her. We're going to Switzerland next week to sit on a mountain."

"That's a good plan," assented Peters. "I wish I could join you there—but I've got to go to Germany, as you know, and must be back in New York by the first of August."

Here the Nattier lady rose to depart, bending with a swan-like motion to submerge herself in the floating mass of vaporous blue which symbolized her evening cloak. The two men followed her with their eyes until she disappeared through an open door of the hotel corridor.

"Good-looking woman," Peters observed; "nice throat."

"Ugly feet," objected Humphrey, and the subject dropped.

Little by little the crowd thinned, the air grew cooler, and the moon rose high in the sky. Only a few people lingered over their liqueurs and cigarettes and with the lengthening night a greater beauty fell upon the garden. Now the violins made themselves heard with more insistence. The leader forgot his ennui and disdain and

falling into a nightingale mood put into his music something of impulsive passion and the rapture of the night,

After a time this, too, ceased. The musicians departed with their instruments. The last diner vanished. Humphrey and Peters were left alone in the garden. The plashing of the fountain was more audible now. They could even hear the soft whirring wings of a night moth hovering near them.

"I heard a piece of news just before I left New York," said Peters, after a while. "Walter Jackson's engagement to Miss Arnold has been broken off."

It was so long before Humphrey answered that the other was uneasy. Finally he asked in what seemed a perfectly natural voice:

"Who told you?"

"A friend of Jackson's—man named Henderson—there's no doubt about its truth—but nobody knows the reason—that is if Jackson himself wasn't reason enough."

"Well," said Humphrey, "I'm glad she's not going to marry a cad."

He tried to suppress the joy rising in him at Norris's news. What if Linda was indeed free? She was as far removed from him as ever. He was contemptible even in her eyes. Between them were endless, insurmountable walls. Even if she could ever be brought to trust him entirely and without question, he himself

was more bound than ever. There was his mother—and now something formless and dark took the irresistible joy by the throat. No—there was no room for exaltation.

But the night was beautiful! It was good to see old Peters again—surprisingly good! He wondered how much his friend understood. There had never been a great deal said between them that Humphrey could recollect. Yet he had always seemed to know everything. He remembered that there had been times when he had come near to resenting even this silent, intimate appreciation of all that was troubling him. Now such sympathy had become acceptable—more—of great value.

In Anglo-Saxon muteness, but bound by a vibrant tie of friendship, he and Peters sat and smoked.

CHAPTER XIX

THE hotel where Humphrey took his mother stood with its terraced garden and its little colony of smaller buildings on the side of a mountain which rose above Lake Geneva.

It was as if the whole picturesquely decked-out settlement leaned from its high-swung place to gaze, Juliet-like, on its lover, the town, far below on the shore of the lake.

The windows of the hotel looked out over wide shimmering spaces of water to blue mountain heights. Each room had its balcony fastened like a swallow's nest to a wall, and from these balconies and the garden below came an intermittent chatter in many strange languages, light laughter, twittering children's voices, and sometimes a burst of unpremeditated song, so that the hotel seemed, Dioneme said, like some vast bird-cote, high-hung, resounding with volatile life.

She was at first happier here than Humphrey had seen her in a long time, planned a new story, and in the afternoon took walks with him in the woods. She rarely appeared before lunch and did not like to be disturbed, so he had the mornings to himself, mornings of

glorious early climbing toward the heights, or hawk-like dips into the valley. When he started out in the dew and sunshine of the hours soon after dawn, all that was not of the instant dropped away from him. He was conscious only of the glory of the world, and of the strength and perfection for service of his own body. He took possession of it, as a man might seat himself at the steering wheel of a perfectly constructed car, knowing he could count on endurance and speed and safety; that he could climb with the stoutest, compete with the most daring; that he was young, fearless, not to be outdone.

One morning he left the hotel at six. At first fog lay about him, soft, dense, and all-enveloping; then it lifted, the sun came out and peeled the shadow off the mountain in front of him as rind is peeled from fruit.

From the hill-side where he stood he looked down into a deep gorge and seemed to see the very roots of the mountain, black and elemental, then up, up, to its dazzling summit, snow-topped, gleaming against the blue. It unrolled before him like a splendid symphony, awful almost in the deafening crash of its mystery and power, the ineffableness of its beauty. But youth and the joy of living were strong in Humphrey, he felt little of either reverence or fear.

"Sometime I will have a try at that," he thought nonchalantly.

Just then, though, he was bound for the valley, having a commission for his mother in the little town.

Soon he left the high levels where the fields were thick with flowers (blue, for the most part, as if, so near the sky, they had caught its color) and where the fine thin air, chilly from the night, smelt of mint and thyme and clover. The path led for a while down through pine woods, sombre and sweet, then through fields again, where he was joined by a little white goat with neat black hoofs and a soft, twitching nose, which she kept poking in his hand, bleating feebly.

Deserted after a time by this engaging companion, he fell in, further on, with a possible male relative of hers, who reared itself in Humphrey's path, plastered with slime, reeking with strong goat odors, its malicious head crowned with large horns, a very symbol of Satan.

The intentions of this apparition being evidently friendly—too friendly—Humphrey discouraged it with a small stone, well aimed, and was enabled to go on his way unaccompanied.

Now the grassy slope of the entire side of the mountain lay in soft doublings and creases like the splendid green-velvet folds of a spreading court train. The air grew warmer as he descended. He passed cottages where round-eyed children played in the sun and slatternly women were busy with morning industries.

Here and there a châlet coquettishly garlanded with roses began to show among the trees. A dog barked at him; once he had to step aside (being now on the high road) to let a motor-car whiz past. Signs of a town multiplied; the uplands seemed far away indeed.

Raising his eyes, Humphrey could see his hotel, astonishingly remote, perched on the heights. A little of his early chanticleer mood left him. He felt warm and hungry and resolved to stop at an unpretentious hotel he knew of a little farther on to get a cup of coffee.

Once seated in the lattice-enclosed veranda of the Hotel du Soleil before a round table covered with a doubtfully clean red and white linen cloth, he took off his cap with a sigh of relief and mopped his hot forehead.

"I must have made pretty good time down that hill!" he said to himself, and fell into elaborate calculations of metres turned into miles.

A waiter as hot, greasy, and unctuous in manner as if he had issued from one of the Hotel du Soleil's large soup pots, the incarnation of its mixed and doubtful contents, appeared and took Humphrey's order.

"Mind you have the milk *hot*, not *boiled*," he directed, "and strained, so there won't be any skim on top of it." The presentation of this desire in French was of the

utmost difficulty and took time, but Humphrey was fastidious about hot milk and had patience until he was comprehended.

While he waited for his *café au lait* a small gray kitten came, mewing, and rubbed itself against his feet.

"Hello!" exclaimed Humphrey with a boyish impulse, "I'll take this home to mother. It will amuse her," and he tucked the little scraggy creature inside his coat, where it began to purr contentedly and weave his shirt with its veiled claws.

Later he gave it a drink of milk from his saucer, paid the proprietor of the hotel two francs to part with it, and so became its master—to his own mind, at least. It is doubtful if a cat ever acknowledges to itself any master.

Dioneme was delighted with this offering and made arrangements for its comforts and conveniences with great zest.

"I shall call it 'Mimi,'" she said, "'*pourquoi—je ne sais!*'—but Mimi is a good cat name. You know, all the morning, I've felt curiously excited. Now I know why. It was because this funny little bit of life was coming toward me. I was going to have a cat!"

Humphrey laughed, much amused.

If his mother had only showed more signs of improvement he would have been fairly happy in these days. But Dioneme grew unaccountably worse instead

of better. Her good spirits, little by little, became more varying and uncertain; she was sometimes irritable, sometimes morose, coughed a little still, and seemed to prefer being alone under one pretext or another most of the time. As for her writing, it had been almost definitely laid aside, though she talked, occasionally, of a new novel.

One day it occurred to Humphrey that his mother's face had changed. In spite of its thinness it appeared swollen in places, the skin about the eyes was discolored, and her splendid red hair, too, looked dull and faded. He tried to talk with Parker, but it was hard to get hold of the woman; she seemed to evade him. Probably she, as well as he, dreaded these interviews, where so much that was usually decently hidden had to be dragged nakedly between them.

Once Humphrey found his mother, with bowed head, gloating over a picture of herself at eighteen which she held in her hand. He turned away hastily, shocked at the revelation of that most sterile and pathetic of passions—the passion of a woman for her own eternally vanished beauty. Yet this with Dioneme was, like other emotions, only a mood and would pass.

Humphrey wrote a long letter to Dr. Mackelvaine about his mother's condition and waited anxiously for a reply. It was long in coming, necessarily, and he almost made up his mind to consult the doctor resident

in the hotel. Dioneme had given up her daily walk and spent her afternoons lying in a long chair on the balcony. One day while Humphrey was reading aloud to her they heard the kitten mewing in the room behind them.

"What does she want?" asked Humphrey. "Is she hungry?"

"Perhaps; call Parker to get her some milk."

"I'll get it; where is it?"

"In a jar, outside the inner door, and her saucer is in the bath room—a little pink saucer."

Humphrey found the milk and started, the kitten at his heels, to look for the saucer. It was not in sight, so he opened various cupboard doors, but to no avail. Finally he noticed a small, square door curiously placed in the low wainscoting, half hidden by a table.

"What's that little place!" said Humphrey to himself. "Perhaps it's there."

He moved the table and opened the low door.

"Nothing but a hole in the wall," he thought, then—"What in the name of heaven—!" He bent over to look more closely and gave a sharp exclamation, quickly suppressed. This row of dark empty bottles, hidden away, loathsome in their suggestiveness, meant one more step in his mother's degradation. How had she found the means of eluding him! There was only one way; Parker had been bought—had betrayed him. He

stood for a moment as if stupefied, incapable of further reflection, and during that moment his surroundings, commonplace as they were, fixed themselves visually on his brain with a hideous and never-to-be-forgotten significance. At last he became aware of the continued mewing of the kitten. He closed the small low door, pushed the table against it once more, and went back to his mother.

His face was perfectly white. He was partly conscious of it, and lest she should notice some change in him he stood a little back of her so that he could not be seen.

"I can't find the kitten's saucer," he said. "You'll have to send for Parker, after all."

"Very well," assented Dioneme; "ring the bell, please."

In the tranquil unconcern of her voice there was nothing to Humphrey but a mockery of him and his would-be protection of her. He felt he could not trust himself to stay with his mother just then. Even his pity for her had lost its usual restraining power.

"When Parker comes tell her I want to speak to her in my room," he said, adding, in an explanatory way, "she hasn't had her wages this month"; and he went out closing the door behind him.

When the maid came to him, ten minutes later, she found him sitting at his writing-table, looking much

less boyish than usual, with something curiously formal, not to say judicial, in his attitude.

"You sent for me, sir?" she said.

"Yes, I wanted to tell you that in looking about Mrs. Wylde's rooms to-day I came upon unmistakable signs that she has found the means of deceiving me, of getting secretly the stuff that, as you know, is poison for her."

The Englishwoman raised her head, suddenly defiant, and Humphrey saw in her eyes, free of dissimulation, a spark of that fierce class hatred which until now he had never been personally conscious of. It existed, then, this dislike and ill-will, merely because one was master and the other servant. It lurked in the dark, cunningly hiding itself behind a show of respect and devotion, betraying at the end all the ties of association, of gratitude and trust.

An instant, and Parker's gaze dropped. She resumed her usual manner, though there was a shade of almost insolent unconcern in her voice as she said:

"There's no use, sir. Better give it to her and let her be happy. There's no help for them when they are as bad as that."

"You admit it was you who got it for her?"

"I was wore out, sir, and she begged so. She's always been very kind to me, poor lady."

"Bribed, of course," said Humphrey sombrely.

He reflected a moment while the maid stood passively hostile.

"You are an untrustworthy woman, Parker," he said at length, "and a bad servant. I am sending today for a trained nurse and Mrs. Wylde shall be put under her care at once. As soon as this person arrives you will start for Paris."

"I suppose you know you're obliged by the law to give me my passage back to New York," she remarked viciously. "I was engaged there."

All at once, with no warning, her face began to work curiously and she burst into a storm of weak and angry tears. Between her sobs came loud vociferation; denials, regret, and pleas for pardon. In her hysteria she scrubbed her coarsely reddened face incessantly with a handkerchief rolled into a hard ball.

Humphrey, who had been momentarily disturbed by the menace of her former attitude, now perceived that she was merely ignorant and lacking in moral perception, driven by cupidity to the coward's road of deceit.

But he was sick at his own disappointment in her. She had been his one ally.

Left alone, he faced the situation with an attempt at confidence.

"It will be better to have a nurse, anyway," he said to himself. "I should have had one long ago. After

all, my eyes are open, and that's so much the better—I know what I'm doing now."

The rest of the day he was busy making plans, telephoning to Lausanne about the nurse, looking up trains, consulting the resident hotel doctor, arranging for the visit of another more celebrated. Action left him little time for thought.

But when night came he found he could not sleep. For hours he lay turning feverishly from side to side, thumping his pillow into one uncomfortable shape after another. Finally, tormented beyond endurance, he rose and went to the window. Drawing back the curtain he stepped out on the balcony. It was three o'clock and the chilly, almost sinister, silence of the hours after midnight enveloped the visible world.

The wall of mountains on the farther shore of the lake loomed up in shadow, mysterious and lonely. Just above, a reddish moon, old and waning, risen late, was already sinking down toward a far horizon. In its disturbed beauty, its ravaged perfection, there was something malign and inauspicious.

It seemed well to Humphrey that there was no one but himself to look upon it.

Suddenly his thought went back to Dioneme, Had not his father called her the Moon Lady!—But Morris Wylde's fancy must have been of some slender crescent gleaming, virginal and remote, in the purple twilight

of spring, or, it may have been of a fuller and more rounded glory, white fire on midsummer nights.

He, thank God! had never dreamed of a moon like this—this wan and evil planet tottering down the sky.

CHAPTER XX

WHAT passed between his mother and Parker after his interview with the latter Humphrey never knew. When he spoke of the necessity of sending the maid away and of his plan for installing a trained nurse in her place, Dioneme turned abruptly from him—she was lying as usual on the balcony—and hid her face. There was to him a new and pitiable abjectness in this gesture. When she spoke it seemed to be with difficulty, as if she struggled against a contraction in her throat. It was the first and only time Humphrey ever saw her give any outward evidence of the torment from which, intermittently at least, she must have suffered, the one occasion when he perceived that her vice was recognized as a part of her, something for which she was responsible.

"Humphrey," she said brokenly, "you must judge me by what I am and not by what I do."

"Don't think I judge you, mother!"

A fit of coughing seized Dioneme. When it was over she said:

"You are right about the nurse. I am not really well. You must treat me as if I were not well, Humphrey. I seem to have no will."

"Don't talk about it, please," said Humphrey. "I understand."

But though he spoke in this way he was, in fact, very far from suspecting the truth of Dioneme's physical condition. Her weakness of body had increased so gradually that he did not realize how much she had changed. What difference he saw in her he put down, despairingly, to her secret infirmity, not to the disease with which it went hand in hand.

When the nurse arrived from Lausanne, a lean, brown-faced Canadian with an agreeable smile, Dioneme's life was reorganized on an openly sick-room basis.

Humphrey was left with more time on his hands, found himself obliged to lunch in the restaurant often instead of in his mother's sitting-room, and so began to be more remarked in the hotel. Nervous fellow-guests, always in dread of contagion, made inquiries as to the nature of Dioneme's illness and were far from satisfied with the explanation of the director of the hotel who pronounced it nervous prostration.

"I am sure I heard her cough," said one bangle-bedecked British spinster to another. "One is never free from those things now in mountain resorts. Soon there will be no safe places left."

This uneasiness seemed, indeed, to lurk always in the atmosphere of the Splendide Hotel like a breath

of unhealthy air. New-comers were given a searching scrutiny and any young person who seemed too thin, with flushed cheeks and over-brilliant eyes, was immediately under suspicion.

Humphrey, however, was unconscious of all this. If he studied the people around him it was from mere idle curiosity and because he had little else to do. There were many fellow-guests, gay and energetic, coming and going, playing tennis, mountain-climbing, dancing at night in the vast, gaudy ball-room. Sometimes Humphrey fell into casual talk with one or another and suggestions were thrown out that he should join them in these diversions, but he always refused, giving his mother's illness as an excuse.

The women at least regretted this. There was one tall brunette, with a mouth which looked as if it had known countless kisses and longed for more, who often darted sly, swallow-like glances at him as he passed.

But sport tempted him more than beauty. Once on the hill-side he came upon a group of young men shooting clay pigeons. The director of the hotel, a stout, eternally frock-coated, polyglot German, fussy and energetic, was keeping score, and some girls in knitted woollen coats with caps to match watched from a board shelter.

On an impulse, urged by the effusive German, Humphrey joined the contestants. As he lifted a gun

to his shoulder the young Frenchmen and Spaniards stood about him, courteous, but with a suggestion of veiled mockery.

"Ready!" cried Humphrey and the two clay balls flew out from the trap under the edge of the hill.

"One! two!"—both birds fell. This was repeated several times. Humphrey, to his secret pride, did not miss a shot. When his turn was over there was a murmur of applause mingled it would seem with a certain astonishment.

"*Vive l'Amérique!*" shouted a fat little Parisian, throwing his cap in the air.

The contagion of the sport seized upon Humphrey. He stayed and shot clay pigeons for the rest of the afternoon. At the end his score stood the best.

"*L'Américain gagne,*" said a Spaniard, who had made the next best record, laughing, a friendly soul even in defeat.

Humphrey, warm with the flush of triumph and the unaccustomed pleasure of good-fellowship, walked back to the hotel with all these gay young people.

The early evening air was cool and crisp and exhilarating. As he bounded upstairs to his mother's room after leaving his companions he hummed a little tune.

But he found that Dioneme had been lonely, missed him during his unusual absence at the tea hour. On

the table, too, lay the long-expected letter from Dr. Macklevaine.

The boyish look faded from Humphrey's face as he opened it. Yes, it was as he had expected. Macklevaine advised that his mother be taken home, provided that a certain doctor at Ouchy should advise it after examination and with a complete knowledge of the case.

"How would you like to go back to New York, mother?" asked Humphrey that evening.

"Now—do you mean?" said Dioneme vaguely.

"Yes—or as soon as you could get ready."

"How long have we been away?"

"Nearly five months."

Dioneme sighed.

"So long!—I thought I should have had my new book more than half written by now. I feel, somehow, as if this year had had a crack in it and time had all leaked away."

"But about going home?" asked Humphrey again.

"Yes—let us go home! One is so comfortable in one's own bed. Will Miss Kingston go with us?"

Miss Kingston was the nurse.

"Of course. You've made a conquest of her. She says she would go anywhere with you."

"One makes many conquests by being pitiable!" observed Dioneme. "So many people enjoy being

sorry for one—I used to have a less abject way of winning favor."

She gazed dreamily down toward the valley where far below them twinkled myriad lights, looking in the cloudy night like diamonds spread out on black velvet. Humphrey wondered what she was thinking of. Since he had known of her long-practised deceit, there had come, in spite of himself, an increased mental alienation between him and his mother which, strange to say, did not materially lessen his affection for her nor her persistent charm for him. But less than ever could he understand her unfettered, every-varying point of view.

Of late there had been added to this native elusiveness the invalid's lack of a sense of the values of outside things.

The world, never very personally important to Dioneme, had narrowed, little by little, to the confines of her own room. Of her bodily state there could be no question at the present moment. She was alarmingly weak. There was even a doubt in Humphrey's mind whether she would be able to stand with safety the fatigues of the journey home, but Miss Kingston assured him that the trip might be of benefit.

This was also the opinion of the doctor from Ouchy when he was consulted.

"Better for her to be under the care of some one who has studied her case from the first," he said gruffly, but observing Dioneme with unusual interest, as most people did.

Humphrey had concealed nothing from him. It would indeed have been useless to try.

The doctor had come to the isolated hotel half under protest, crawling up the hill in the snorting funicular with curses on the heads of spoiled Americans who insisted on having everything come to them. But when he saw his patient he did not altogether regret the enforced expedition. From a psychological standpoint, if from no other, she was interesting. And he had been told that she was a well-known writer. He lingered longer than was strictly necessary beside Dioneme's chair on the balcony, talking with her about this thing and that, and looking out over the wide stretch of water and mountain and sky spread before them, a mingling of blue so intense and radiant, so shot with sunlight, that it was hard to face it with unblinking eyes.

When he finally left he encountered the nurse in the corridor. She was one who had often worked for him and he gave her a friendly nod of greeting.

"Bad case," he said briefly, indicating the room from which he had just come. The nurse assented mutely, with the deference of her position.

"You think it is best for her to go home, sir?" she ventured to ask.

"Hm!" said the doctor. "It doesn't matter now where she goes."

"As bad as that!" murmured the nurse involuntarily.

The doctor shrugged his shoulders with a gesture which indicated regret, helplessness, and an acknowledgment of the inevitable and they parted.

A week later Humphrey and Dioneme left the hotel to begin the first stage of their homeward journey. It was a cool September morning, too early for any one to be about but the manager, the clerk, and some of the employees of the hotel who stood near the entrance to say farewell to the departing guests.

They were to drive down the mountain in an old-fashioned barouche with two horses, as the trip in the funicular was considered too fatiguing for Dioneme. Miss Kingston had gone on ahead to arrange about the luggage and the railroad accommodations at the station in the valley.

On the drive Dioneme was unusually talkative, stimulated perhaps by the excitement of her early rising, by the bracing morning air, and the prospect of change and adventure. They went at a snail's pace, brakes on, horses straining backward.

"It is always supposed to be so easy to go downhill," said Dioneme, "but it is quite the contrary for many people. Puritans, for instance—you know the type—their downward course is such an involuntary holding-back at every step that immorality becomes, I dare say, really fatiguing."

"And the depths cease to allure," added Humphrey, delighted to see his mother in such a communicative frame of mind. She had been unnaturally silent of late.

"We will soon pass the place where the kitten came from," he said again. "I must show it to you."

"Poor Mimi," exclaimed Dioneme. "The porter's little girl has her. She will grow up and forget me."

"Cats don't love us like dogs."

"Cats are only little toy tigers—all their movements are of the jungle—that's why they fascinate one," his mother said. There was a silence while they descended lower and lower and the cool air blew in their faces.

Suddenly Dioneme stretched out her thin hand from the huge sleeve of her fur travelling coat and laid it on Humphrey's. Her deep eyes as she looked at him had something of their old sparkle.

"Isn't it delicious to be going somewhere!" she exclaimed—"and I love this road—the pine trees in the

gray mist! After all, I was *very* tired of being up there on that hill! Weren't you, Humphrey? Didn't it bore you at times?"

It was the first occasion on which she had ever considered Humphrey in this matter, but now that the idea had finally come to her she was all interest and solicitude.

"You must get very tired, too, of being with me all the time," she went on, studying his face. "Are you *sure* you never find it dull with me?—I know you say you don't."

Humphrey laughed with an appearance of lightness, though this appeal seemed to him affecting.

"Did any one in your whole life ever tell you you were a bore, mother?" he asked, tucking the rug more tightly about her knees.

But Dioneme was not to be put off.

"I know you have never cared much for girls," she said, "but you like men—and sport—and all that. It seems to me that perhaps you ought to be freer—to play about more."

"What about mountain-climbing," said Humphrey. "Feel my muscles!" extending an arm for investigation. "Nothing soft about that, is there? These weeks have done me no end of good."

Dioneme, apparently convinced, mused in silence. Finally she said with something like timidity:

"It's very strange, Humphrey, that you've never been in love!"

He did not answer immediately, neither did he burst into laughter as she had expected, dreaded perhaps, for Dioneme was as much poet as novelist and approached the idea of love with something more than psychological curiosity.

"Don't deceive yourself, my dear, I've been in love scores of times."

"But scores of times adds up naught in love—you don't understand the arithmetic of those things."

"Perhaps not."

"You have nothing romantic about you," was Dioneme's conclusion.

"Thank God!" breathed Humphrey fervently. "I suppose you would like a youthful Shelley for a son."

Dioneme laughed.

"I like you just as you are," she admitted, and so, talking lightly, with that amazing temporary forgetfulness of darker issues which alone makes human existence possible, they descended the mountain.

CHAPTER XXI

THE first person Linda met when she returned to New York toward the end of October was Miss Godwin. Their encounter took place in the lift at the Colony Club, as they were on their way up to the dining-room.

"Lunching alone?" asked the old lady. "So am I—shall we lunch together?"

Linda assenting, they went into the small members' dining-room and sat down at a round table.

One of the club servants in livery presented a card.

"The regular lunch," said Miss Godwin, waving the man away, "bring everything and we can eat what we like—Now tell me about your summer, Linda." Miss Godwin's popularity rested on the warm human sympathy which is genuinely interested in everybody.

"Well," began Linda obediently, "we were on Long Island all the time except for three weeks at Bar Harbor. I meant to go to the Adirondacks to stay with the Worthingtons, but their mother died and they had to close the camp. We are in town earlier than usual because father got so tired going in and out every day."

"So on the whole it's been a pleasant summer?"

"Very," Linda replied, but without enthusiasm. Miss Godwin looked at her shrewdly and wondered, for the thousandth time, what had been the real story of her brief engagement to Walter Jackson. Certainly there had been no tragedy about it, yet Linda's face had acquired a new meaning, the expression one associates with deep experience.

"You look too lovely, Linda, my child!" said the old lady lightly, aloud. "How many hearts are you going to break this winter?"

"What does one break hearts with in New York?" asked the girl laughing, "a sledge hammer?"

"Don't be cynical. It's not your style. I know it's the fashion nowadays. Romance went out with the hoop-skirt. I suppose you would say that both inflated human beings unnaturally, but I sha'n't give you a chance."

"I'm not romantic, I expect," said Linda with an involuntary sigh. The sigh again reminded Miss Godwin of the girl's broken engagement, and she chasséed gracefully away from the question of romance.

"By the way, I hear dresses are to be stranger than ever this year," she said, "skirts a couple of yards wide. Can you imagine *me* in a garment like that?"

"You could never wear anything but what was pretty and becoming, I'm sure," said Linda.

"You're a smooth-tongued young person, Linda Arnold! I'm not sure it's not your smooth tongue more than your pretty face that throws the 'come-hither' (as the Irishman says) over us all."

"Talk about flattery!" exclaimed Linda.

"Well, well! here are our eggs at last. If they're not good I shall write a letter to the House Committee," and she fell to with an appetite.

"This is true, this is *real*," said Linda to herself, in the meantime, "sitting here with Miss Godwin in the Colony Club and eating *œufs Meyerbeer*." The night before she had lain awake and thought of Humphrey, of her disillusions in regard to Walter, and her own loneliness. Now the remembrance of this emotion seemed fantastic to her. "It was all nervousness and imagination," she thought, forgetting that the night before she had just as emphatically decided that feeling alone was real, and that everything else in life was merely routine and mechanism.

Miss Godwin, her first hunger appeased, and having heard all the news of Linda's family, proceeded to give a rapid epitome of recent gossip. Finally Mrs. Wylde's name was mentioned.

"She's back again you know, with her good-looking son at her apron strings as usual. I hear that she's no better. Do you know anything about it?"

"No," said Linda, "I've not seen anything of her

for some time. You remember I told you so when we were talking of her at your luncheon last spring." In a less composed voice she added: "I wish I knew how she really was!" Her own agitation surprised her. She thought that Dioneme, as well as Humphrey, had gone out of her life. Did nothing ever really come to an end then! She still held the belief that life was a series of disconnected episodes, at the end of each of which one wrote "finis" as one thought fit.

"It will be easy to learn," said Miss Godwin, replying to Linda's words. "Poor Dioneme! One can't think, somehow, of a white flame like that being put out."

"Put out!" repeated the girl, shocked and arrested. "Do you mean——"

"If one could only see her—" Miss Godwin said, "but the son is always on guard. I believe it's true that he doesn't wish his mother to have any friends, though it seems senseless!"

Linda went away from the luncheon saddened and alarmed. Was Dioneme dying? No, it could not be possible. And must it all begin over again—her attempts to see her, Humphrey's persistent refusals, the old baffling mystery of it? Why could she not be allowed to forget? But she had loved Dioneme; her friend might even now turn to that love and wonder that it failed. She remembered how beautiful she

had been on the day when she had last seen her, lying in the glow of the spring afternoon with the green jade beads in the folds of her dress, but how weak and ill even then! Finally in her despairing uncertainty Linda determined to see Dr. Macklevaine, though she knew him but slightly, and learn from him the truth about Dioneme's condition.

But how to do this? She felt that she could never go to his office on such an errand, and to call him up on the telephone seemed equally difficult. If only they could meet by chance!

In the child-like hope of this she waited a week or ten days, asking, meantime, every one whom she thought might know for news of Dioneme. But nothing happened and she could learn nothing definite, so that her anxiety grew with suspense. More and more this one thing obsessed her.

At last, strangely enough, her opportunity really came, for one day as she was standing in the anteroom of the Ritz-Carlton she saw Dr. Macklevaine. He had just finished lunching with a confrère from Washington, and was emerging from the restaurant redder-faced than ever, corpulent and unconcerned, when Linda accosted him. At first he did not recognize her. There was to his mind an astonishing resemblance between all young girls. They were like rows of tulips, gayly pink and white, inconsiderable.

This one, he observed, had a quantity of bronze-colored hair and a green feather in her hat. He looked at her vaguely but benevolently.

"You don't remember me!" said Linda aggrieved, far from guessing how little of the responsible adult she seemed to the old doctor. "I met you once at Mrs. Wylde's—and you set father's arm when he fell from his horse and broke it."

Linking herself thus to the absorbing interests of existence Linda finally became a definite personality to Dr. Macklevaine.

"Of course I remember you!" he said. "You're Gregory Arnold's daughter. Is your father well? I've not seen him for months."

"Yes, father is very well, thanks, but it was about Mrs. Wylde I wanted to ask you. I hear so many stories about her—that she is ill, seriously ill, and yet I can't seem to get at anything definite. Can't you tell me how she really is?"

Here was a daring and ignorant young intruder indeed, crashing through all the defences of private sentiment and professional etiquette. Yet why put up signs warning off the premises if the trespasser could not read. This was plainly a case of simplicity and ignorance, and Arnold's daughter was a pretty child, very much in earnest too. The doctor was not sure that there had not been a slight mist of tears in her

eyes. He asked himself, puzzled, if this could have been possible.

If he hesitated before speaking it was not because he was so much vexed at the question as at a loss for an answer which should evade as well as satisfy.

Not for an instant did he contemplate revealing the truth. Even he, hardened as he was by long experience, had not yet been brought to accept it. But yet this young thing must be answered, put off!

"You are a great friend of Mrs. Wylde's?" he asked finally, wondering what part in Dioneme's life his questioner could play.

"I am a great admirer of her's," said Linda, "I am very fond of her."

"Ah!" observed the doctor, not much enlightened.

"I don't ask from idle curiosity," urged the girl, "you must see that!" This time he was certain about the quick blur of tears in her eyes. "Won't you tell me how she really is?"

Something in Macklevaine's breast responded to the blur of tears. He understood them indeed. They might have been light drops on the surface of his own hidden well of pain.

"One doesn't feel about Mrs. Wylde as about the rest of the world," Linda went on. "She is different from any one else."

Again the depths of old Macklevaine's soul re-

sponded. "Yes," he said, "she has a mind and soul given to few of her sex. She has also great physical vitality. It is on that we have counted until now."

"Ah!" said Linda with a sudden sharp breath, "I can see you think she is very ill!"

People coming out from the restaurant looked inquisitively at this oddly paired couple, absorbed as they were in their talk.

"I have not said so," replied the doctor. His expression was non-committal, but he underestimated Linda's powers of intuition.

"But tell me there is hope," she urged, "that she may get well." Without being conscious of it they had moved gradually to one side and now stood in a more or less sheltered corner near a great potted palm.

"My dear child," said Macklevaine gravely, "I am a physician and a physician never admits there is no hope." But his tone contradicted his words and there was no need to inquire farther. Lidna knew.

One thing more she must find out though before they separated. She put it in another eager, tremulous question.

"Do you think that I could see her?"

"She doesn't see many people," replied the doctor. "Quiet is best for her, but possibly—do you know her son? He might arrange for you to pay her a short visit. Mind you—it's got to be a short one!"

Linda's face darkened at this allusion to Humphrey, but she made no comment.

"Thank you," she said to the doctor. Having played his part he was no longer necessary to her, but even in her sorrowful preoccupation she found time for a passing regret that people as old and world-hardened as he could know nothing of feeling or sentiment.

Macklevaine, to Linda's mind, had passed the age of human sympathies, moved in a far-off, unimaginable world, gray and sterile, where time was spent in the observation of scientific facts and the fostering of material comfort. He was as inconsiderable from her point of view as she was from his. Yet across the breach made by the passing merely of one generation they gazed for a moment at each other before they parted with not unfriendly curiosity.

Linda went home dazed and bewildered, as if she had been caught in some street accident and slightly wounded—she did not yet know how much. It was true, then, the vague, disquieting rumor! Dioneme was really going to die. For the first time in her life an outer circle from the eternal shadow crept near to Linda. Her own environment dimmed. A chill enveloped her. She tried to resist it, making an effort to be brave and face the matter reasonably.

What would Dioneme—touched now by this mystery—be like? What would she say?

Linda was awe-struck—half frightened—longed yet dreaded to go to her friend.

Would she talk of death or would it be possible to ignore everything that was tragic! Her reluctance was the inevitable protest of youth, always pagan in its instinctive impulses, intolerant of all that is not, like itself, health and beauty and joy. Finally the spirit of love conquered this diffidence. More than ever she longed to pour out for Dioneme all her affection and pity.

She tried to think of a plan by which she might find her way to her without Humphrey's intervention. Not that she was afraid this time of a rebuff, she felt there could be no more petty jealousies. Not even Humphrey, hard as his enemies believed him, would try to stand between her and his mother now. Nevertheless her anger against him persisted. What was it that had brought Dioneme so low? Overwork, perhaps. The thought was intolerable. But how could she arrange to see Dioneme? Suddenly she thought of Emma Cooper, of whom she had had no news for a long time. Of course Emma was the one to whom, as once before, she could appeal.

CHAPTER XXII

CONSULTING her address book Linda found the whereabouts of Emma Cooper and, at the earliest possible moment, set forth to look her up, smiling a little ruefully at the thought that she was now to see for herself the long-fabled domain of Mrs. Mindelbaum.

The house when she found it was a dingy, high-porched, brown-stone relic on Lexington Avenue. Cheap lace curtains festooned the windows, and the outside steps were stained and unswept, wisps of straw and paper decorating the corners.

A small and impudently jovial negro boy answered her ring, his grinning self-assurance changing to awe however as he caught sight of Linda's motor-car. The door, opened at first only half-way, was swung wide, and a strong and sickening odor of boiled cabbage poured out in great volume.

Upon inquiring for Miss Cooper Linda was told that she was at home, as indeed was expected, it being the hour when she always returned from her day's work, and rested a little before her dinner.

The visitor was shown into a front room divided

by curtains into two separate apartments. From behind these curtains came the murmur of low voices, the occasional wail of a baby, and a smell of arnica liniment equalling that of the boiled cabbage in intensity, but it was apparently a place of unbroken gloom, for no light of any kind showed over the screening curtains. Linda wondered if it were the last post held by the Mindelbaum family, or if, in a press of lodgers, the end of the drawing-room had been rented out to some one not too exacting in the way of light and air. On her side of the curtains there reigned a prim neatness which was at the same time grimy and frayed, with an abundance of tawdry decoration which failed to decorate: crocheted woollen mats, stamped gilt picture-frames, Japanese fans, Christmas cards, and ornaments from the ten-cent counter of some cheap department shop. The lights in the imitation bronze chandelier had shades made of rose-colored paper, and two china lamps were adorned in the same way. Linda took in these details with a vague and sympathizing pity. Did not the hand-painted tambourine on the draped mantel-piece represent the same struggle upward toward beauty as the old Ming jar which stood on her own? The rose-colored shades of crimped tissue-paper also struck her as symbolic and touching. She imagined the elderly, hard-working spinster boarders sitting of an evening in this pink glow.

While she was examining a photograph of a group, presumably the Mindelbaum family, Emma Cooper came in. There was no trace of agitation in her manner as they exchanged greetings, though the red of intense nervous excitement colored her prominent cheekbones. Probably of all the events of life, the one she had least expected was a call from Miss Arnold. Her sense of what was due to her own self-respect and her knowledge of deportment would have kept her outwardly calm, however, under even more distracting events.

"Do sit down, Miss Arnold," she said. "You'll find that rocker most comfortable, I guess, though rockers are kind of old-fashioned now."

Linda made a slight gesture toward the end of the room where behind the curtains the murmur of voices still continued. "Why couldn't we go up to your room where we could talk without being overheard?" she suggested.

For the barest instant Miss Cooper hesitated.

"Why, of course," she said. "If you don't mind climbing three flights of stairs. I would have hated to have asked you."

"I don't mind in the least, and those people back there, whom one hears without being able to see, make me just a little self-conscious."

"Dear me," said Emma. "You needn't have

minded them! It's only Mrs. Mindelbaum's married daughter—but I guess it *will* be quieter upstairs."

They made the ascent silently, accompanied by the smell of boiled cabbage in diminuendo. At a door near the fourth-floor landing Emma paused.

"That was Flora Kelly's room," she said in a whisper, and Linda felt a sudden, creeping unpleasantness and disquietude, as if she had been shown the room of some one who had died a violent death. The whole ignominious, commonplace tragedy woke in her memory. How strange that it should have played a decisive part in her own life! And here she was stealing past little Flora Kelly's door like an interloper. She wondered what had become of the girl but was half afraid to ask, her feelings toward her were too complex—pity and disgust and some dim unclassified emotion which bore a resemblance to gratitude. Certainly she had never loved Walter, but some things are nevertheless an offence to one's pride.

In this uncertain mood she was ushered into Emma's hall bedroom, with its hangings and covers of silkoline. A shelf of books and a framed photograph of Mrs. Wylde witnessed Miss Cooper's greatest claim to distinction. Linda sat down on one of the two chairs and smiled at her hostess.

"How pleasant you have made your little room," she

said. "I could have recognized it in a minute from what you told me!"

"Oh—Miss Arnold," exclaimed Emma, quite choked with the intensity of her feelings, "if it hadn't been for you I'd never have got back to it. You couldn't ever have come to see me in the room I was living in when you got me that work last April."

"Was it as bad as all that?" said Linda. "Poor Emma!—but you like your work now—don't you, and have plenty of it?"

"Everything's fine now, thank you. See here—Miss Arnold, I want to show you this photograph. It's Flora Kelly—taken when I first knew her—a real, pretty little face, isn't it?—but no chin to speak of. I guess that's what was the matter with her. People can't get through life without chins."

Linda contemplated the weak, childish face in silence for a moment.

"Where is she now?" she asked. "Have you ever heard from her? I remember you told me last spring you had only received a post-card."

"Oh—I had a long letter from her not so many days ago—sort of a pathetic letter! She passed over a good deal. I had to guess at things. She said she'd been sick for quite a while—there at that farm in Indiana where she went. Those silly little things like Flora go down pretty deep into life sometimes. Strange—

isn't it! But it don't change them much. They come out just the same as ever.

"She's quite well now and it seems she's met a man who keeps a drug store in the nearest town to where she is and he's in love with her and she's going to marry him. She says he is a handsome man and well-to-do and that she's very happy. He's building a new house for her and has bought her a pianola."

"Do you suppose she told him about New York?" asked Linda after a moment's hesitation.

Miss Cooper sighed.

"There's no telling," she said. "Flora never seemed to sense the importance of things—or what was right or what was wrong. Perhaps she told him and he didn't care. There are men like that, or maybe he just took her side. She had a way of making people sympathize with her even when she was to blame. And she was pretty enough for anything."

"Yes," Linda replied, still regarding the photograph. "She was certainly pretty." After a little she laid the picture down on the table.

"So that's an end of Flora Kelly's story," she said gravely.

"For you and me, I guess," Emma replied, not even dimly imagining how her visitor's own story had been woven with an ugly thread from little Flora's.

"Well," said Linda, drawing a long breath as if about to enter on the serious matter of her visit, "I suppose you're wondering what I've come to see you for, Emma."

"I hope it's because you want something of me. There's nothing that would give me as much pleasure as that."

"Yes, I do in a way—do you ever work for Mrs. Wylde now?"

Emma's face saddened.

"Oh, don't you know, Miss Arnold," she said. "She can't work now. I guess she isn't ever going to work much more."

"Do you ever see her?"

"Yes—I go to the house sometimes—to see if there's some little thing I can do for her. I worked for her so long she kind of likes to have me about. She don't see many people."

"Her son doesn't wish it?" There was a shade of almost unprecedented bitterness in Linda's voice.

"No. Mr. Humphrey watches over her more than ever. I never saw a young gentleman so devoted to his mother."

"What I want you to do," said Linda firmly, "is to find out from Mrs. Wylde whether she wants to see me or not, and if she does, arrange a meeting—even if Mr. Wylde disapproves. Will you?"

"Of course I'll do anything you say," began Emma doubtfully—"but there's the doctor—what if he thinks it would be bad for her?"

"I've already talked with Dr. Macklevaine—he didn't disapprove of my seeing her for a few minutes only. It's only her son who wants to keep everything and everybody away from her."

"I'm sure Mr. Humphrey knows what's best," faltered Emma, torn by divided allegiance.

Linda, with an effort, maintained a reserved silence, and not even by the expression of her face made Emma acquainted with her own opinion of Humphrey. Undoubtedly, too, a subtle and inadmissible interest in hearing his name mentioned persisted with her scorn of him.

"It isn't as if Mrs. Wylde wouldn't be sure to want to see you—" went on Emma, arguing with herself.

Linda looked at the framed photograph on the wall—and it seemed to her to wear the same sweet, baffling smile as the original.

"You think," she asked, "that she really would care?"

"Why—I never saw her take such a fancy to any one, Miss Arnold, as she did to you. She talked about you lots—you know her way of saying things. I heard her tell Mr. Humphrey once that you looked

as if your lips said, 'Kiss me,' and your eyes said, 'If you dare!' "

Linda rose and examined the photograph more closely.

"That's a very good picture," she said. "I never saw it before."

"She's changed since then," Emma remarked, dusting the frame carefully with her handkerchief. "You'll be kind of shocked if you see her. It's better for you to be prepared. I wasn't—and I sha'n't ever forget my first glimpse of her after she got back from Europe. I could hardly keep from crying. There was always something about her that made you feel sorry, somehow, and excited at the same time—(it's hard to describe)—and now that she's so sick it's much worse."

"She must have failed very fast," said Linda. "In the spring she didn't seem so ill—did she?"

"Oh, I guess no one knew how ill she was—and those things go quick toward the end."

" 'Toward the end,' " echoed mournfully in Linda's soul. She had been talking with calmness enough—but now something made her suddenly faint and tremulous. Her self-control failed and her throat swelled with emotion. It seemed impossible that Dioneme should die—never more impossible than now when she was assured of it. But Emma talked on, dry-eyed,

with the composure of those who are familiar with the grimness of both life and death.

"You see, I've got all her books," she said, laying her hand on the shelf. "Everything she ever wrote —and most of them have a dedication. 'With best wishes from the author.' See here!" and she opened "Hilmer Brothers" and showed the inscribed fly-leaf to Linda with pride.

"I typed all of them except the first two. One of them's got a character in it quite like me. I don't know whether she ever meant it or not."

"She always used to say she never took her characters from life."

"Well—I guess she never *meant* to—but writers don't always know when they're remembering and when they're making up."

"I'm sure she never wrote anything to *hurt* anybody," said Linda.

"Yes—I'm sure of that," agreed Emma, "or at any rate she never intended it if she did."

Unconsciously they were talking as if Dioneme had already become a thing of the past. Their voices had the note of tenderness and solemnity with which women speak of the dead.

After a time Linda grew aware that the little room where they sat was almost entirely dark. In their absorption they had not noticed that the daylight had faded.

"Let me light the gas!" cried Emma, suddenly alert and hospitable.

"No, no," cried Linda, to whom the dim light was welcome. "I must go now! And you will telephone me when Mrs. Wylde can see me?"

It had been tacitly assumed between them that Linda was to have her way.

"Yes," said Miss Cooper. "I will telephone—but I daren't let Mr. Humphrey know!"

"Don't worry about that," replied Linda. "You are not doing anything wrong. Mrs. Wylde can surely decide for herself—and we have Macklevaine's permission."

"Yes," assented Miss Cooper, but half-heartedly still.

A faint suspicion that there was something in the relations of Linda and Mrs. Wylde and her son which she did not understand passed for the first time through her mind.

CHAPTER XXIII

AS once before, Humphrey, coming home and going directly to his mother's sitting-room, was surprised to find there a slight feminine figure. But this time it was not an unfamiliar one. Standing under the portrait of Dioneme, Linda, his little love, faced him with something of defiance and agitation, a bright color glowing in her cheeks.

Looking at her Humphrey realized how unalterably dear she was, how brave and sweet in her mistaken anger against him and her loyalty to his mother. His eyes, hungry after long abstinence, took in every subtle detail of her, the little beauties his lover's imagination fancied it had discovered for itself, the odd slant of her eyebrows, the soft delicious spot behind her little rosy ears, the wave in her hair where it dipped, curving, over her eyes.

And he waited for her to speak, knowing the peculiar vibration in her voice would affect his nerves as always, dreading yet longing for it.

But Linda was silent, unable it seemed to find words, and he was forced to have pity on her and speak first himself.

"It is a surprise to find you here," he said. "I didn't know that you were coming."

The girl fancied she heard displeasure in his even tones, resentment at being as it were outwitted.

"Your mother wished to see me. If I hadn't made sure of that I would not be here. Dr. Macklevaine, too, gave me permission. It was only you who wished to keep us apart."

Humphrey made no reply.

"Do you deny it?" urged Linda, after a moment.

"No," he said.

"Yet you knew I loved your mother—and that she, I think, liked to have me with her."

"I wanted you to love her," said Humphrey simply. "I wanted your love for her to remain always the same—what it was when you first knew her. Have you seen her yet?"

"No," said Linda. Not yet. The nurse told me to wait here until she called me."

"Yesterday was one of her bad days," said Humphrey, sighing a little at the remembrance, "and to-day she is feeling the effects. Wouldn't it be better for you to come some other time perhaps? It is a pity to keep you waiting here."

He spoke with formal courtesy, moving aside from the door as if to let her pass if she wished.

But Linda disregarded this suggestion.

"You talk of affection," she exclaimed, "but what do you, yourself, know of it? Can you pretend to really love your mother—unselfishly? If what people say is true you have failed to prove it." There was an almost brutal directness in this speech—the directness of which extreme youth alone is capable. Only inexperience is merciless.

"And what do people say?" asked Humphrey. He had gone nearer to her and was looking squarely into her eyes. In their excitement they had both raised their voices.

"Why do you want me to repeat it! Words make it coarse. I become coarse myself only by talking of it."

"But I wish to know. I insist on your telling me." Something in the very violence of their words showed that this was a quarrel between two who had been, and perhaps still were, lovers. Under their anger, stimulating it and supporting it, was a wave of passion.

"You know the facts. Why do you take any interest in the comments on them?"

"I have a right to know. Tell me what they say," repeated Humphrey masterfully.

"Let him hear then!" thought Linda, and she poured forth the whole arraignment—that Humphrey had allowed his mother to work in order that he might

live in idleness, giving up his profession and all ambition to make a place for himself in the world; that when his mother's health had broken down under the strain of too much mental labor, he had, with an eye to future provision for himself and fearing interference from outsiders, gradually alienated her from all her friends and acquaintances, breaking engagements without excuse, absenting himself with his mother for long periods of time without any cause or explanation and giving no address—"And as for me," concluded Linda, "you said you loved me—almost persuaded me that I cared for you—but when I could not accept the idea of your giving up your profession to live in idleness, when I told you it would be impossible for me to love a man I couldn't respect—you made no effort to change, but simply accepted my decision and showed your resentment by trying, in every small and petty way possible, to prevent my seeing your mother. You *punished* me, as it were, for daring to criticise you by taking away from me all companionship with your mother—the thing that was my greatest pleasure."

Here poor little Linda's nerves got the better of her completely and she began to sob, uncontrollably, like an overstrained child.

Mingled with her anger was a confused sense of shame and paltriness which she could not account for.

No security of righteousness upheld her. Her own arguments seemed unconvincing now that her tirade was at an end.

And Humphrey never answered. That made it worse, more unbearable. She sank weakly in a chair and hid her face, while he stood over her, protectingly almost, but still without words.

Something of strength and calm seemed to come from him, even in his muteness. Instinctively she yielded to it and little by little ceased to sob.

"Why don't you defend yourself?" she asked naïvely. "Is there nothing you have to say?"

"I do not want to 'defend myself' as you call it," Humphrey replied, "but I am not the blackguard you try to make yourself think me—and I love you and I shall always love you. What is more, I think in the bottom of your heart you love me."

Linda, protesting, started to answer, but just then Dioneme's voice came to them from the room beyond, weak but unmistakable.

"Humphrey!—Linda!" it called.

Linda, startled, dismayed, sprang to her feet. She saw that the door between the sitting-room and the bed room was very slightly ajar. Forgetful now of themselves she and Humphrey exchanged a glance full of consternation. How much had Dioneme heard? What would it mean to her?

"Humphrey! Linda!" called the voice again, sweet but imperious.

Further hesitation was impossible. They must obey. Humphrey pushed open the door for his companion and followed her into the other room.

They saw Dioneme lying on a couch pulled near the window. Tipped back against blue, lace-covered cushions, her face did not at first seem to Linda greatly changed, except that a new quality had been added to its beauty, a quality she could not define—something luminous, impersonal, penetrating.

"Come here, children!" said Dioneme, reaching out a shadowy hand.

As they went nearer to her she looked at them both with a kind of grave wonder.

"Why didn't you tell me you were in love with each other?" she said; "why did you leave it to chance for me to find it out?"

Humphrey tried to answer, but she stopped him.

"Ah, yes, Humphrey—and I found out more besides—that it is I who have kept you and Linda apart all this time—I with my hideous secret. 'Protector of the house,' Humphrey—to your own cost! I should have guessed! But now it is time for truth—and Linda must have it!'

Again Humphrey tried to protest, but his mother did not heed him. With a slight gesture she motioned

Linda to her side. The girl sank on the floor by the couch, her face upturned, her hand in Dioneme's. Humphrey withdrawing into the shadow at the corner of the room watched them both intently. His mother seemed to have become, of a sudden, supremely human. All her fierce and splendid egotism was, as if at once and finally consumed by the flaming-up in her of the divine, the will to sacrifice self for love of another.

"You have been a good little friend to me, Linda," said Dioneme to the girl. "You have cared for me a good deal, haven't you?"

"If I could only tell you how much," moaned the girl.

"You've thought me a wonderful creature—perfect, I dare say!"

"There was never any one like you!"

"Ah!—I wish I might have left that memory!—" the cry was instinctive, not to be controlled. "But you've been deluding yourself, Linda. I'm not the woman you think. I've two natures; one that looks over the heads of other people in some ways perhaps, one that lies in the mud at their feet. You've only seen me star-gazing—but Humphrey—poor boy! has found me, many times, lying low. He'll tell you what my vice has been, a common, degrading vice—outcasts have it more often than kings. It's been a hard thing to hide, but Humphrey has contrived to

hide it by giving up all life of his own—all love of his own!"

Here Linda gave a smothered cry which somehow wrung Humphrey's heart more than all his mother's words.

The older woman laid her hand lightly on the girl's shoulder:

"You see, you've been in the wrong," she said. "When your heart said 'love him' you should have trusted it. You've just said there was never any one like me. Was there ever any one like Humphrey?"

There came an inarticulate dissent from the corner where Humphrey stood. Dioneme answered it immediately; "Yes—I know you've always hated words, my dear boy—but things must be said sometimes—better when it's not too late!"

Her son crossed the room swiftly and leaning over kissed her hair in his old fashion, struggling now for self-control. Linda's face was still hidden.

"I know you are sorry for me—both of you," said Dioneme. "Perhaps you would be even more sorry if you could guess what the horror of the struggle has been—for there was a struggle—I didn't go down willingly, no one does."

She paused a moment, shaken by nervous weakness and suffering. The ordeal was almost too much for her.

"I have seen an unclean spirit face to face," she said at last, almost in a whisper, as if to herself. Linda shuddered and the silence in the room was painful.

At last Dioneme, with a great effort, threw off this oppression.

"Somehow I feel that everything will be different now," she said. "When I am well I shall not be the same woman. We will never talk of this any more—but you will not believe I *knowingly* kept Humphrey from you—will you, Linda?—The truth is hateful enough without that."

Did Dioneme know when she talked so confidently about the future that for her it would be short?

"Oh—I can never believe anything against you!" moaned the girl. "I shall always love you just the same. Nothing that you say can ever change my thoughts of you!" For the moment she felt she was speaking the truth, but Dioneme was not deceived. Her deep eyes were full of wisdom and profoundly sad. When she spoke again, however, it was even more lightly.

"And now will you two children go and talk to each other for a while?" she said, "I feel that I should like to rest a little. I am tired and want to lie quietly and think everything over. It will all weave itself into a kind of pattern I expect—like a story. Things have always been stories to me—even my own life!"

Humphrey and Linda kissed her and went out of the room lingeringly, hand in hand.

After they had gone Dioneme lay motionless, her eyes on distance and something like her old whimsical and evasive smile on her lips, though the tears wrung from her by the bitterness of her confession still moistened her cheeks.

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